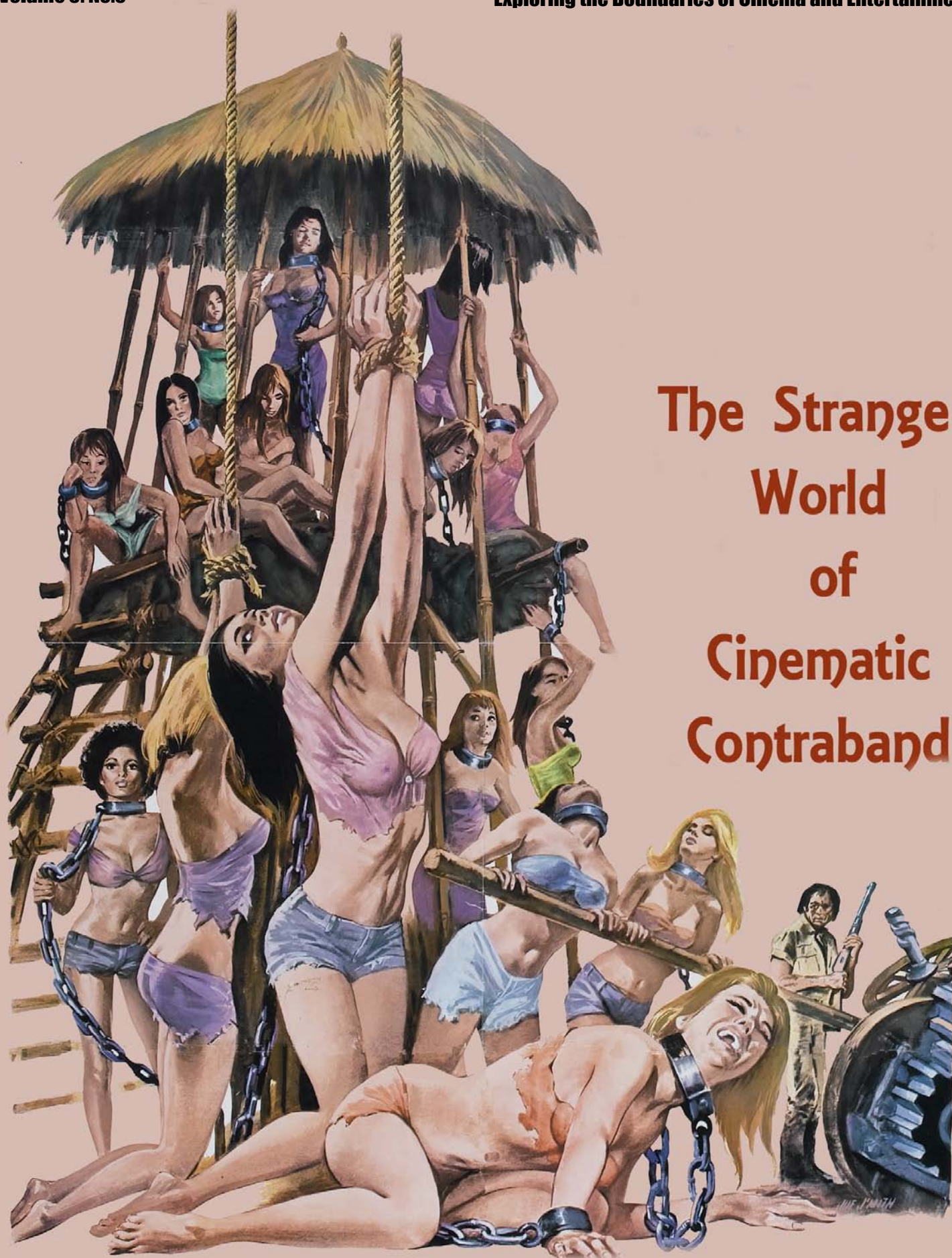


SYNERGY

Volume 3: No.3

Exploring the Boundaries of Cinema and Entertainment



The Strange
World
of
Cinematic
Contraband

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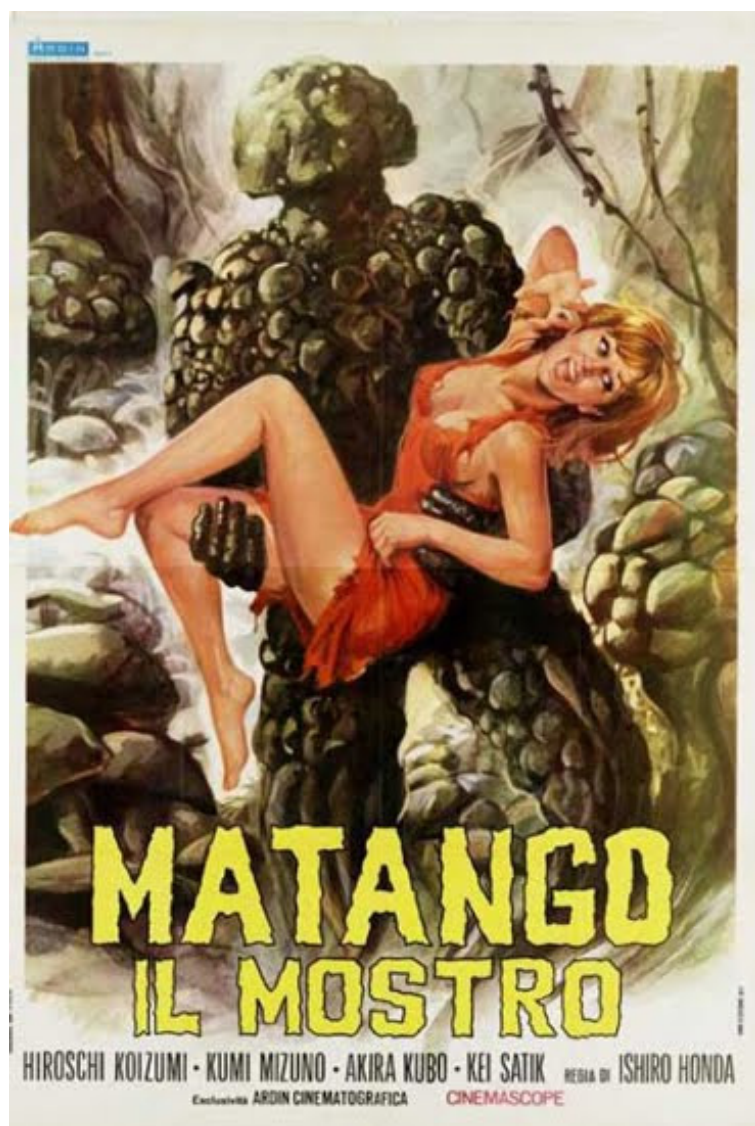
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Synergy Magazine reviews DVDs from all regions. The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

DVD-R

DVD-R refers to titles which have not been formally released on DVD but release via specialty DVD firms.

NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

Blu Ray

We review Blu Rays from all regions; we will clearly list the region (or region free) on each disc.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is <http://www.blu-ray.com>. It includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only

reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

If you require an ALL region DVD and Blu-ray player, we recommend you look at the Kogan Blu-ray player (<http://www.kogan.com.au>)

For Adult titles, we include an extra reference **(E)** for explicit, **(M)** for mature. Adult content within mainstream titles will be mentioned as appropriate.

DD refers to Digital Download with the format of the download following in brackets.

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Features, articles, news and competitions only appear in the digital and print editions.

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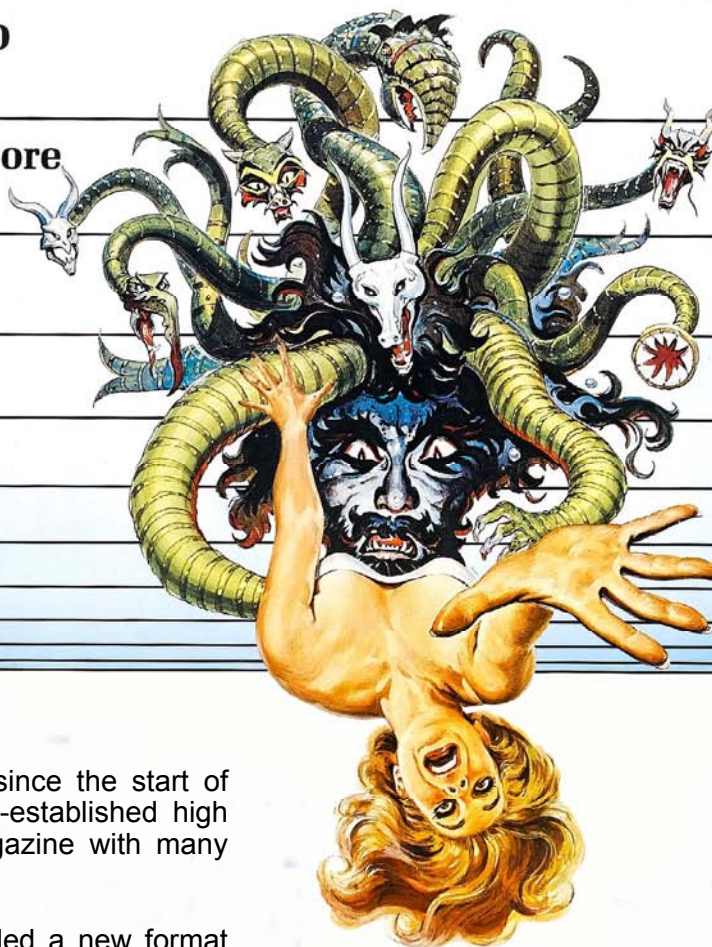
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**A few years ago
in Dunwich**

**a half-witted girl bore
illegitimate twins.**

**One of them was
almost human!**



We have come a long way since the start of Synergy. We are now a well-established high circulation genre cinema magazine with many different modes of distribution.

As of this issue we have added a new format known as "Issuu". For quite a while we have worried about those poor souls who have limited download limits (and that applies to nearly anyone who uses torrent files!) and the size of our pdf download.

Issuu is an online reader which allows you to read the full colour edition of Synergy without having to download the whole issue. It loads quickly, looks great and has lots of online tools. You can choose select articles or pages to view and download directly if you so require. We have not replaced the pdf download but have added Issuu as another way to enjoy Synergy.

The print edition has also gone back to having both a Deluxe and Standard edition. Due to rising printing costs we have decided to continue offering both formats.

The Deluxe Edition has full colour throughout and is quite a collectible, while the Standard Edition has full colour covers and grey scale printing throughout. Both are more books than magazines and will create a veritable library of research on genre cinema. Advertising has been kept to a minimum, a few pages at the back of each issue.

The Sin-ema was successful, albeit a little controversial. We have never been willing to ignore the more unusual facets of cinema or for that matter, accept censorship and will continue to include an erotica section in each issue, which we hope you enjoy.

The current issue continues this trend exploring "Cinematic Contraband". This is the world of cult and exploitation cinema and is a goldmine of content indeed. From the work of Quentin Tarantino to exploitation cinema, from Giallo to cult car films.

Our next issue is a change in pace, called "The End is Nigh" it casts a cynical eye on the "End of the World" in cinema and entertainment. With an introduction on the "The End of the World" in history and cinema with special reference to such recent releases as *2012* and *The Road* it will include lots of fascinating and challenging content.

Your feedback is always welcome.

**The Editors
Synergy**

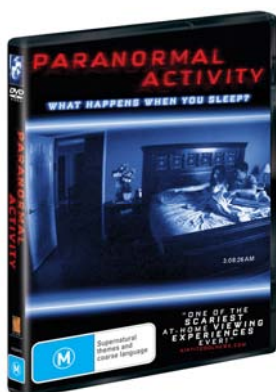


GIVEAWAYS



Paranormal Activity Icon Distribution Release Date: April 2nd

From hot new horror director Oren Peli comes the worldwide phenomenon that has terrified audiences everywhere and has become Australia's second highest box office result for a horror film of all time. A young, middle class couple (Katie Featherston and Micah Sloat) move into their suburban 'starter' tract house. They become increasingly disturbed by a presence that may or may not be demonic and is most active in the middle of the night-especially when they sleep. Or try to. As the weeks progress, the unexplainable presence becomes more malevolent ... don't see it alone.



Icon has given us five copies to giveaway, send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *paranormal* as the subject and your name and address in the text for a chance to win.

Anchor Bay Entertainment also has some great new releases and we have some excellent titles to giveaway.

Staunton Hill

Raw terror is growing, a horrific secret is waiting, the brutal harvest is about to begin. When a group of hikers take off for a weekend of fun and adventure in remote mountain region, they unwittingly stumble across the Staunton family.



They soon find themselves at the mercy of the depraved, diabolical brood who will stop at nothing to rid their property of these "trespassers".

Anchor Bay has given us two copies to giveaway, send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Staunton Hill* as the subject and your name and address in the text for a chance to win.

Day of the Triffids

A fast paced, futuristic and electrifying take on John Wyndham's epic novel *Day of the Triffids*.

A freak cosmic event causes most of the Earth's population to go blind and scientist Bill Masen is one of the lucky few to retain his sight.



The London he walks is crammed with men and women needing help. The streets are full of panicked, blind mobs and the city has descended into chaos, but an even greater nightmare awaits...The Triffids, genetically modified plants mass-produced for their 'Triffoil', have escaped from their farms and are making their way towards the city.

It is down to a select few to take a stand against mankind's deadliest adversary, a foe with a fatal sting and an unquenchable taste for human flesh. Humanity's greatest hope is about to become its greatest threat.

This is a superb mini series 180 minutes in length.

Anchor Bay has given us four copies to giveaway (two Blu Ray and two DVD) send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Triffid* as the subject and your name and address in the text for a chance to win.

Random entries will be chosen and sent either a Blu Ray or DVD edition, if you do not have a Blu Ray player please write "DVD ONLY" with your name and address.

These competitions are open to entries from AUSTRALIA ONLY.

Grindhouse Releasing

Presents Duke Mitchell's *Gone with The Pope*

Oscar-Winner Bob Murawski to Introduce Festival Screenings

Grindhouse Releasing is proud to announce that Duke Mitchell's long-lost 1970s crime saga *Gone With The Pope* will be shown on screens across the country following the film's successful world premiere in Hollywood.

A renowned nightclub entertainer, singer and movie actor known as "Mr. Palm Springs," Mitchell directs and stars in *Gone With The Pope* as an ex-con who hatches a plan to kidnap the Pope in exchange for the ransom of "a dollar from every Catholic in the world."

The movie has been described as "the holy grail for lovers of B-movies" and "a true gem from the American underground."

Gone With The Pope was shot in 1975 but remained unfinished at the time of Duke Mitchell's death in 1981. The film reels sat in his son's garage until Grindhouse Releasing owners Sage Stallone and Bob Murawski offered to take a shot at piecing the movie together.

Murawski took charge of the restoration and spent 15 years giving Mitchell's low-budget movie an A-list treatment in between editing Sam Raimi's *Spiderman 1 & 2 & 3*, *Drag Me to Hell* and *The Hurt Locker*.

Murawski and wife/partner Chris Innis won Best Film Editing Oscars for their work on *The Hurt Locker* the same week that *Gone With The Pope* premiered at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood.

"The audience response to the movie at the Hollywood premiere surpassed my wildest expectations," Murawski said.

"The turnout was incredible, with the Egyptian Theatre filled to almost capacity. And the crowd was with the movie the entire time - laughing, gasping and cheering at all the appropriate places. The film ended to a thunderous applause that lasted a full minute."

It was like a Cannes Film Festival screening. Or a rock concert. After 15 years of hard work finishing this movie, the feeling of accomplishment was tangible and profound."



*"My only regret was that Duke himself was not with us to share it. However, I'm certain he was there in spirit. I feel we have done something truly special in finishing *Gone With The Pope*, and am excited that audiences across the US and beyond will get a chance to experience the movie on the big screen in its upcoming theatrical tour."*

The buzz from the film's debut caught the interest of Landmark Theatres, which has been working with Grindhouse on the revival of Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead*. *Gone With The Pope* is scheduled to open on Landmark screens in New York City, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Houston, Dallas, and Washington, D.C.

Murawski will travel to Copenhagen to introduce *Gone With The Pope* at the CPH PIX Film Festival this month.

He will also attend a festival screening at George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in May 2010.

Web: <http://www.GoneWithThePope.com>

Amy's in the Attic

This is the Official Teaser Trailer (edited by Martin Gauthier) of Mathew Saliba's sixth film, "Amy's in the Attic," slated for a Summer 2010 release.

"Amy's in the Attic" stars Kayden Rose (of "Vampyros Lesbos" and "Dark Lotus" fame), Matt Lacas, Lisa Di Capa, Sebastien Fournier, Chastity Castro and Mathew Saliba.

The film tells the story of a group of friends, Amy (Kayden Rose), Shawn (Matt Lacas), Barbara (Lisa Di Capa), Mitch (Sebastien Fournier) and Suzy (Chastity Castro) who gather at their ringleader Alucard's (Matthew Saliba) place one evening for an old fashioned swinger's party. Unfortunately, the party isn't living up to expectations, so Alucard suggests that they play a game.

Everyone must write their name down on a piece of paper and place it in his hat. Whomever's name is selected from the hat must be the others' slave for the evening. Needless to say, Amy's name is selected. What starts off as an innocent game of testing one's limits ends in a horrific tragedy involving rape, violence and female degradation.

You can check the trailer out at:
<http://tinyurl.com/35ms5bm>



Plaseebo Qeeology 2.5

Plaseebo is pleased to have been invited to create a custom for "Qeeology 2.5", the Toy2R 15th Anniversary World Tour.

His 2.5 inch Qee titled "Kaiju Qee" has a hand cast resin head with pink plastic eye inserts and glow in the dark paint with a salmon wash.

Yes, he stands up on his own.



Toy2R USA & LOCAL TOYS USA proudly present

Qeeology 2.5

Toy2R 15th Anniversary World Tour

May 7th / 7:00-10:00
MARZ martini bar 1140 O Street
 Lincoln, NE



The World of Cinematic Contraband



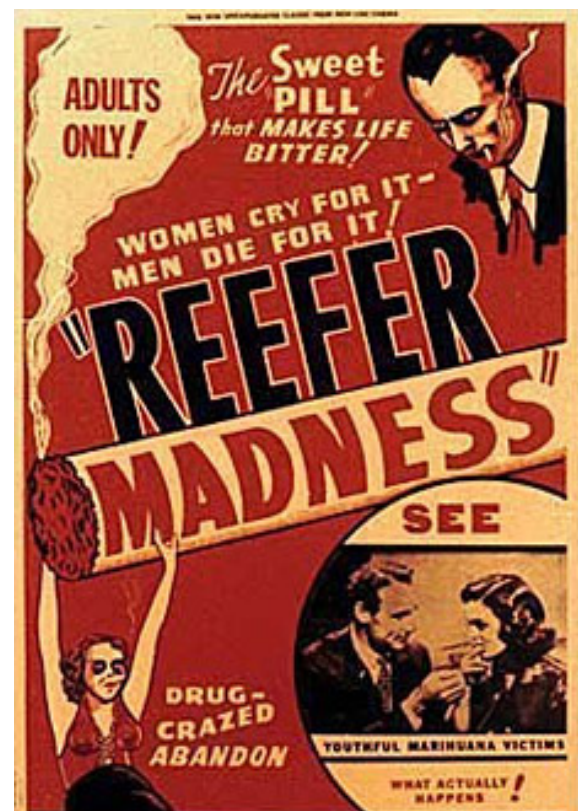
What is Cinematic Contraband ? The term contraband usually refers to goods that exist outside normal forms of trade; in times of war it was used to refer to goods available from a neutral country which did not sell directly to either side. In terms of cinema it is a great term to describe movies which are outside the mainstream, and represents non-Hollywood cinema which includes cult, exploitation, indie and underground cinema. Many use it interchangeably with the term "exploitation cinema." However the problem arises as to what is actually meant by the term exploitation, and more difficultly the demarcation line between exploitation and other forms of cinema. Often one person's exploitation entertainment is another person's cult cinema. For example, a feminist would define all adult titles as exploitation while most others would not agree.

According to Wikipedia "*an exploitation film is a type of film that is promoted by "exploiting" often lurid subject matter. The term "exploitation" is common in film marketing, used for all types of films to mean promotion or advertising. These films then need something to exploit, such as a big star, special effects, sex, violence, romance, etc. An exploitation film, however, relies heavily on sensationalist advertising and broad and lurid overstatement of the issues depicted, regardless of the intrinsic quality of the film*".

While such a definition seems valid there is always a cross-over between cult, indie, underground and exploitation cinema. Hence an umbrella term is of more value so we can explore the underbelly of this unusual genre. Accordingly I think a wider classification is useful. Some film historians use the term "paracinema", but here we have chosen the term Cinematic Contraband. It should also be noted there are many films which move between genres. For example, some titles begin as mainstream (such as propaganda, anti-drug and health films) and move into the exploitation cinema genre with time.

When the first title within this genre appeared is a matter of debate. Films such as *Damaged Goods* (1914) which had a strident moralistic message about remaining clean and pure for family and nation would now certainly be placed in this category, since they became parodies of their original message. Many propaganda films of the period including *Fit to Win* (1919) and *The End of the Road* (1918) included quite graphic footage and certainly would be considered exploitation cinema. This led to a moral backlash from the politicians and churches of the period. In 1921 a self-regulation code was adopted by the industry. Sex, sex hygiene, white slavery, drug use, vice, and nudity led the list of disapproved topics.

Filmmakers, however, worked out all sorts of ways to contravene the code. This list was formalised into the Motion Picture Producers and





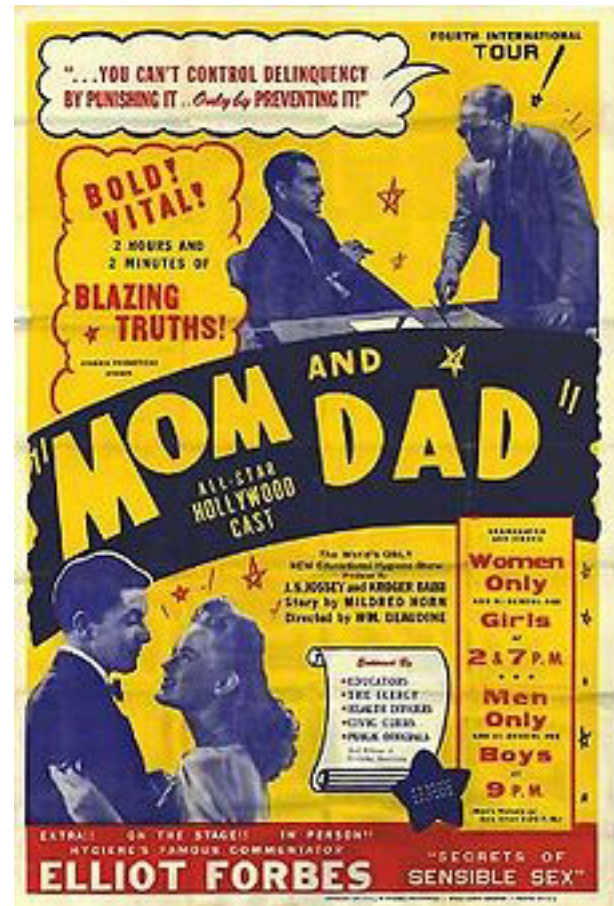
Distributors of America's "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" in 1927 and the Hays Code in the 1930's.

Regardless of these restrictions the 1930's and 40's saw the development of "cautionary tales". These "shock" films covered everything from sex hygiene to patriotism, drug use to homosexuality. *Reefer Madness* (1936) is the best known of the period explaining the terrible dangers of marijuana even going as far as to suggest that it was more addictive and dangerous than heroin. Related films included *Marihuana* (1936) and *Assassin of Youth* (1937). *Narcotic* (1933) is in a similar vein but focused on opium addiction.

Sex Madness (1939) discussed venereal disease and premarital sex while *She Shoulda Said No* (1949) was an explosive expose of both drug use and promiscuity. Films such as *Slaves in Bondage* (1937) and *Mad Youth* (1940) explored the dangers of prostitution and the exploitation of women. While *Child Bride* (1938) discusses older men marrying much younger girls especially in relation to the Ozarks where girls were being married off as young as ten years old.

Mom and Dad (1945) is a superb example of precision exploitation film marketing. Pregnancy and childbirth were exploited in a film which was publicised as a supposedly informative title. Directed by William Beaudine and produced by exploitation filmmaker Kroger Babb, *Mom and Dad* snuck behind censorship lines by presenting itself as being of "educational" value. They even sold sex-education books to add to the hype, making a fortune from the title *Man and Boy and Woman and Girl* which they created to go with the film.

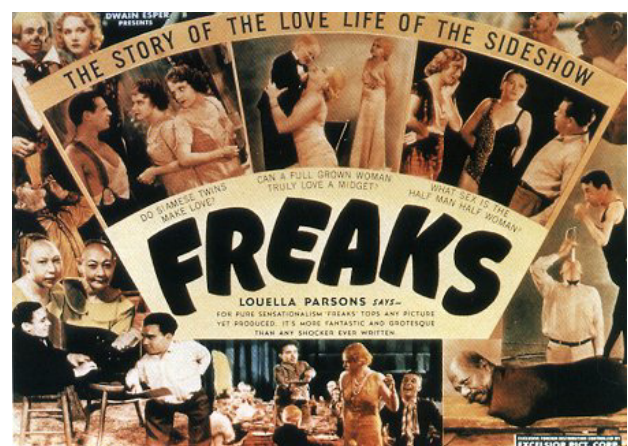
The film was condemned by the National Legion of Decency but still became one of the highest-grossing films of the 1940s.



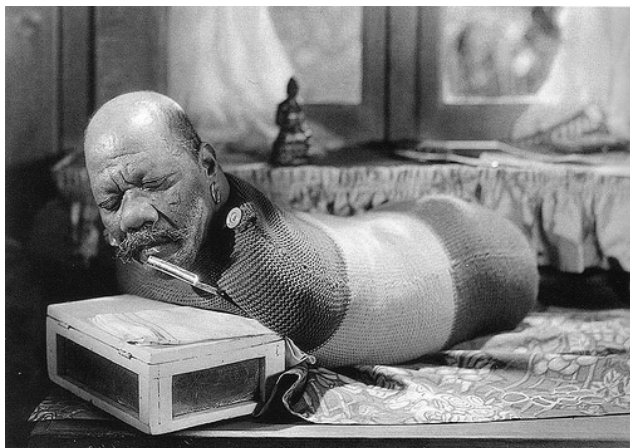
Freaks

One of the most outrageous films of the 1930's which stands quite alone in the history of exploitation cinema is *Freaks* (1932). An amazing work of cinema which stars real life disabled performers including "half-man" Johnny Eck, dwarf Harry Earles and conjoined twins the Hilton Sisters as well as bearded ladies, hermaphrodites, and pinheads.

The film, while being an exploitation classic, does not denigrate those labeled as "freaks",



British poster for Freaks



One of the disabled characters from *Freaks*

indeed in the end it is the able-bodied who are made to feel degraded. Tod Browning did an amazing job creating a real sense of the outsider life of the carry. It was a film that shocked and horrified its audience and some thirty minutes were censored from the film which have never been rediscovered. It was banned for many years and was only released during the 1960's, a special restored edition of the film is now available with as much footage as could be found.

Nudie Cuties and Nudism

While sex education films flourished in the Thirties, many of the films pushed the limits by showing brief shots of nudity. Early films such as *This Nude World* (1933) and *The Unashamed* (1938) used the nudist movement as a means to show nakedness, predominately female, within the context of supposed education. However, this trend really did not become significant until the 1950's when girls bouncing and playing nude on a beach became the trend. The best examples of nudist films from this period include *Garden of Eden* (1954), *Naked as Nature Intended* (1961), *Nudist Life* (1961), and the films of Doris Wishman such as *Beauties in the Sun* (1960). She produced seven nudist films between 1960 and 1964.

Around the same time there was a boom in magazine publishing. Titles ranged from sleazy underground magazines to more mainstream fare. Many of these magazines featured nudist images and/or images from nudie cuties films and



hence the two mediums helped feed each other. One of the best sites to explore the world of these naughty magazines is Bad Mags (<http://www.badmags.com>), there are also two exhaustive volumes, *Bad Mags Volumes 1 & 2* by Tom Brinkmann published by Headpress. The first issue of *Playboy* also dates from 1953 and this helped fuel the interest in films which featured nudity and mild erotic content.

The market for gay images was more complicated and many early gay publications were disguised as health magazines. In the late Forties there was *Health and Strength* and in the early Sixties *Modern Adonis*. *Physique* was more obvious in its orientation and began in 1961 followed by the *Athletic Model Guild*. A.M.G published photographs and made male-oriented erotic films. Many of these titles included elaborate outfits and costuming and were marked by a strong fantasy element.

This movement from Nudie Cuties into sex fantasy films could also be seen in heterosexual cinema. Russ Meyer began his career with the *Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959) which is considered the first post nudie cutie erotic film. Based on a homophone for the word tease, it is a erotic fantasy focused on women with large breasts, an obvious fetish for Meyer. Meyer continued to make erotic films in the nudie cutie vein for quite a while with *Eve and the Handyman* (1961) and *Wild Gals of the Naked West* (1962). He followed trends and moved into roughies, exploitation and even mondo documentaries, producing an amazing array of films



which continue to be popular. Other films which fall within this category are Doris Wishman's bizarre science fiction sex comedy *Nude on the Moon* (1963) and Ed Wood's horror sex comedy *Orgy of the Dead* (1965). Late in the fifties we saw a certain loosening up of mainstream cinema, the first Carry On film dates from 1958. At this time the industry looked for more challenging content. Slowly eroticism developed a harder edge and began to move into what has become known as Roughies.

Roughies

Roughies were a pivotal stage in the development of a wide range of sub-genres. It would be fair to say they gave birth to such explosive cinematic categories as rape-revenge, biker, Nazisploitation and sexploitation. At this stage a division developed between what could be defined as general erotica and exploitation cinema. While soft erotica, much of it imported from international sources and given a veneer of "exoticism" developed into one market, harder-edged exploitation developed into another. Of course they overlapped and have continued to do so through the history of both forms of cinema, but as porn attempted to become more mainstream the division between the two has been carefully demarcated, if not for political purposes alone. In Australia with its NVE (non-violent erotica) classification exploitation and fetish films cannot contain any explicit sexual content or they will be refused classification.

Joseph P. Mawra's *Olga's Girls* (1964), *Olga's House of Shame* (1964), *White Slaves of Chinatown* (1964) and later *Olga's Dance-Hall Girls* (1969) marked the beginning of this new trend with its S & M overtones, misogyny and rough sexuality. Other prime examples include Russ Meyer's *Lorna* (1964) which is probably an even better example. With *Lorna* Meyer has



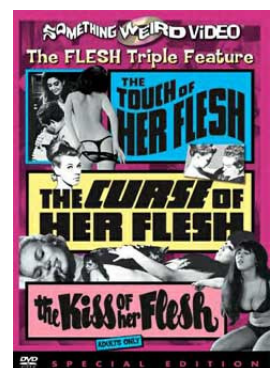
Scenes from *Olga's House of Shame*



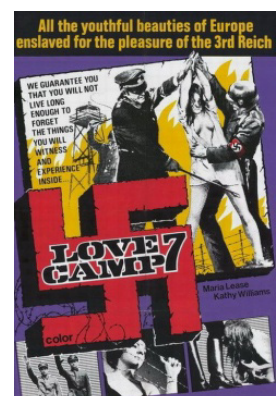
Russ Meyer's *Lorna*

moved out of his Nudie Cutie stage into exploitation cinema. *Lorna* is a lurid tale of rape, betrayal, and murder set in the Deep South of the United States. Lorna is unhappily married but well endowed. Her life changes when she meets an escaped convict who rapes her repeatedly and makes her like it. She escapes him, but find she misses his violent attention so much she returns for even rougher treatment including a creative use of garden tools !

An interesting series within this genre is Michael Findley's *The Touch of Her Flesh* (1967), *The Curse of Her Flesh* (1968) and *The Kiss of Her Flesh* (1968). The plot is about Richard Jennings who walks in on his wife doing the wild thing with another guy. He runs into the street in shock and bumps into a car. This triggers some sort of psychological breakdown and Jennings becomes a psycho killer who sets out to take his revenge on women in general.



A further significant film from this period was *Love Camp 7* (1968). This was the first film within what became known as the Nazisploitation genre. It is fairly mild compared with what was to come. A Jewish scientist is being kept captive and must be rescued, so two female agents are sent



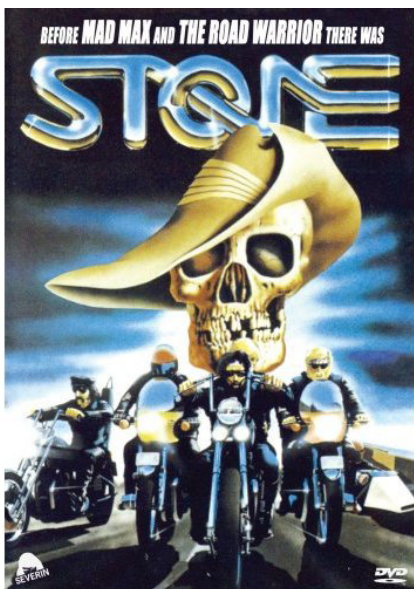


Marlo Brando in The Wild One (1953)

undercover inside a Nazi sex camp. There is a cruel commandant, sadistic guards and a lesbian doctor, and of course there is also lots of sex, torture, beatings, lesbian action and bondage.

The roughies also included what are now known as Biker films, the first being *The Wild One* (1953) starring Marlon Brando. These moved in and out of the mainstream cinema of the Fifties with hot rod and street films such as *The Black Rider* (1954), *Motorcycle Gang* (1957) and more taboo titles such as Kenneth Anger's gay motorcycle classic *Scorpio Rising* (1964).

The genre continued to develop producing hundreds of films which combined biker themes with exploitation, sex, drugs and violence. Just some examples include *Motorpsycho* (1965), *Devil's Angels* (1967), *Born Losers* (1967), *Hells Angels on Wheels* (1967) *Rebel Rousers* (1969), *Cycle Savages* (1970), *The Glory Stompers* (1967), *Easy Rider* (1969) and the Aussie Biker classic *Stone* (1974).



Exploitation Horror

When the sex market started to go soft, Herschell Gordon Lewis and David F. Friedman looked around for new markets and decided to make a gore-ridden horror film. While horror had been done before, nothing had been produced with a high level of explicit violence, blood and guts. Together they produced the very first gore film, *Blood Feast* (1963) which became an instant drive-in-theatre success. This was quickly followed by *Two Thousand Maniacs* (1964) and *Color Me Blood Red* (1965). While horror may not be always within the exploitation genre, Lewis and Friedman used gore in a shocking and sensationalist manner which created a new genre, the horror exploitation film.



The gore explosion of Blood Feast

Lewis later followed with films such as *The Gruesome Twosome* (1967) and *The Wizard of Gore* (1970). Titles such as *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) blurred the line between horror and exploitation, a line which continues to be difficult to define throughout the history of both genres. Modern examples of films which hover between both genres include *Mordum* (2003), *Murder Set-Pieces* (2004), *Blood Sucking Freaks* (1976) and *Nekromantik* (1987).

Mondo Films

A "Mondo film" is a documentary depicting sensational topics, scenes, and situations. These tend to have a focus on "extreme" subjects such as sex and death, but not always. They use a mixture of footage including real and faked to create the sensational effect required.

While there were various early exploitation faux documentaries such as *Forbidden Adventures* (1935), it is generally agreed that the genre



began with the outrageous Italian film *Mondo Cane* (A Dog's World) (1962) by a journalist-turned-director Gualtiero Jacopetti and former naturalist Franco Prosperi. It covered all manner of subjects from sex to death, strange customs to animal cruelty. It shocked, stunned and amused audiences worldwide. The film struck a careful balance between humour and horror, alternating subjects for emotional impact and effect. Wealthy pet owners in Pasadena bury their beloved and pampered pets in yuppie graveyards while tribes people in Taipei braise puppies for a Sunday supper!

Mondo Cane was followed by *Mondo Cane 2* (1963), *Women of the World* (1963), *Africa Addio* (1966) and *Goodbye Uncle Tom* (1971). These films were all made to exploit the diversity of customs worldwide and shock Westerners who had little knowledge or experience of a world outside their own experience. A superb box set of all the titles is available from Blue Underground (R1).



Confronting scene from *Mondo Cane*



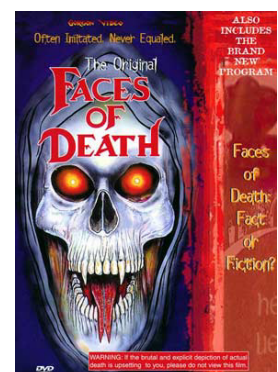
Mondo films tended to coalesce into various sub genres. On one hand you have the general "Mondo" film which exploit the differences between cultures and are marked by sarcastic commentaries and a sense of black humour. The *Shocking Asia* films (1976/1985) could also be placed in this category. They were marked by the use of the "strangeness" of other cultures to shock their audiences.

On the other hand you have "sex" films such as *Mondo Topless* (1966) by Russ Meyer and *Sweden Heaven and Hell* (1968) which used the pseudo-documentary style to get as much sex on screen as possible under the guise of legitimate education!

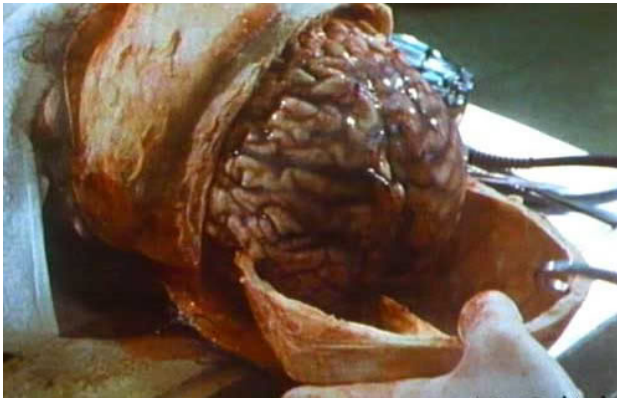


The third category were the death Shockumentaries. While death was always exploited in early Mondo films, it was only one aspect of the overall story. However a new form of Mondo film developed focused purely on death.

The first major film in this category was *Faces of Death* (1978). *Faces of Death* was originally released into the Japanese market and slowly seeped into the West by black market video tape. Of course, this fed the desire for the film and it was an instant success.



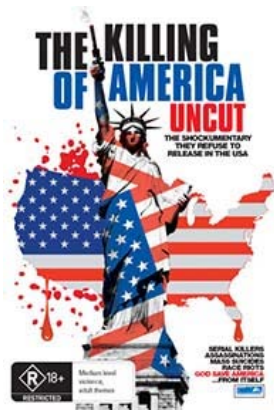
Faces of Death is a mixture of faked and real footage, it is estimated around 40-50% of the scenes have been faked (at a minimum). It has a "exploitation" look and



**The infamous monkey brains scene from
*Faces of Death***

feel. It opens with an introduction by Dr. Gross who comes across as a very unlikely clinician! *Faces of Death* is one of the most successful cult films of all times and was followed by a range of sequels.

While certainly shocking, so much of it was so obviously faked that *Faces of Death* is more entertaining than offensive. Many films that followed lacked the ability to balance shock with humour, fake footage with real footage and these are much more difficult to stomach. Examples include the *Death Scenes Series* (1989 onwards) and *The Killing of America* (1982).



As exploitation cinema developed various sub genres began to evolve. Many of these combined elements of the various exploitation forms into new and more unusual sub genres. Just some of these include Nazisploitation and Nunsploitation, Rape Revenge films, Women in Prison, Blaxploitation and sexploitation.

Nazisploitation

Nazisploitation cinema is a genre of exploitation film which has a strong emphasis on sex and violence. It uses World War II and National Socialism as a pretext to explore all manner of sexual and violent excess. The most celebrated in the field is *Ilsa, She Wolf of the S.S.* (1974). *Ilsa* which stars Dyanne Thorne as the Aryan commander who tortures her way through a Nazi camp working to prove her theory that woman

were more able to deal with pain than men. *Ilsa* castrates men who fail to satisfy her and enjoys flogging workers. The mixture of cruelty and eroticism is what made *Ilsa* such a successful, if not controversial, film. They are also the key elements of Nazisploitation cinema.



Ilsa was directed by Don Edmonds using the sets from *Hogan Heroes* and hence the film looks far more professional than one would expect from an exploitation title. *Ilsa* was followed by a various sequels in a similar vein such as *Ilsa Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks*.

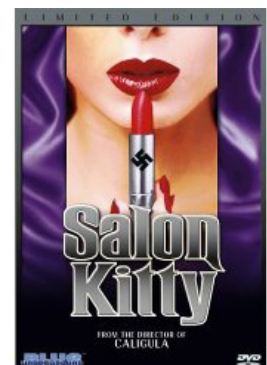
Other examples of the genre include the earlier *Love Camp 7* (1969), *Hell Camp* (1977) and *Love Train for the S.S.* (1977). However *Ilsa* is seen as the standard for its extreme level of violence and its surprisingly professional acting and presentation.

The genre has always been a controversial one, exploiting such an event marked by such extreme suffering for laughs, sex and violence will offend many. At the same time it has produced a wide range of films ranging from serious exploitation to comedy, cult to mainstream.

Last Orgy of The Third Reich (1977) is an example at the extreme end of the spectrum with wild sex and even a Jewish cannibal feast.

While *Salon Kitty* (1976) by Tinto Brass and *Salo* (1975) by Pier Paolo Pasolini use the subject to tell more serious stories.

While *Salo* is considered a significant work in the history of cinema it is still banned in Australia. The definitive edition is the British Film Institute DVD.





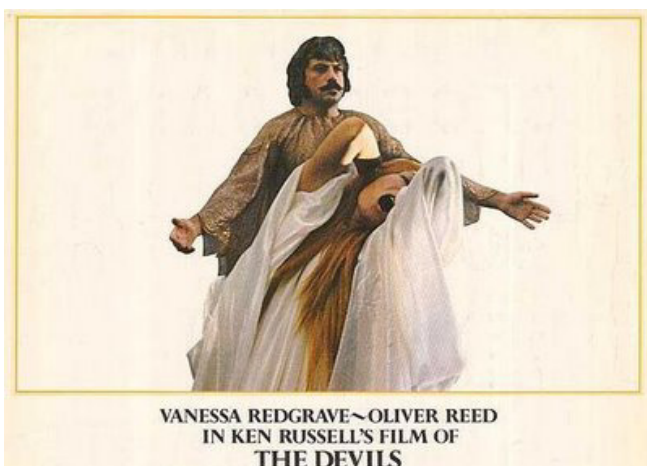
Black Mass from Haxan (1922)

Nunsplotation

It is quite fascinating to chart the development of this genre throughout cinema history. Most film historians see its precursor in *Witchcraft through the Ages* (aka *Haxan*) which was a Danish film by Benjamin Christensen made in 1922. *Haxan* is really quite astounding. It opens with a series of woodcuts and engravings and then offers a series of dramatic vignettes illustrating the awesome power of witchcraft in the Middle Ages. In 1968 a shorter version called *Witchcraft through the Ages* was released with a jazz soundtrack and voice-over by Sixties radical author William Burroughs. The definitive DVD edition is the Criterion R1 release.

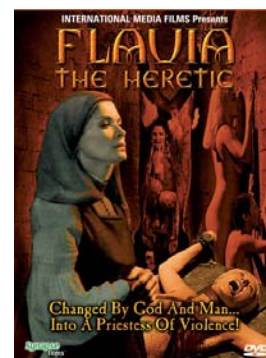


The real focus of Nunsplotation cinema was in the 1970's with the majority of films coming from Europe. Many mark its beginning with *The Devils* (1972) by Ken Russell. It starred Oliver



Reed and Vanessa Redgrave with outstanding designs by Derek Jarman who went on to become a major filmmaker in his own right.

Other classics from the period include *Nun and the Devil* (1973), *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1973) and *Flavia The Heretic* (1974). *Flavia* is forced into a life as a nun by her father, Sir Richard. She is unhappy with her lot and finds the rituals demeaning. One day a strange cult called The Tarantulas arrive at the convent and introduce the girls to strange rites of ecstatic devotion.



Of course this leads to all sorts of extreme behavior as the nuns relieve their frustrations with dances and visions. One of the nuns loses control, tearing off her habit and caressing her naked body while imagining a statue coming to life and satisfying her every need. The nunnery is finally brought back under control by the authorities, the Tarantulas are expelled and the rather over-excited nun thrown into a cell. The nun is taken away by the Bishop and then tortured under the authority of her Sir Richard.

Flavia becomes more and more disillusioned as she sees the new Duke raping a farm girl. She runs away but is caught and whipped. Finally, broken but still rebellious, she plans her revenge, when a band of Moslems attack the town, she joins them and returns to the convent to teach them all a lesson.

While it has been generally assumed that the focus of the genre has been on monasteries and the inquisition, there have also been many films which have pushed outside these boundaries and moved the genre into the modern period such as the ever popular *Killer Nun* (1978).



Killer Nun aka *Suor Omicidi*, or *Deadly Habits* (1978) is Italian in origin. Directed by Giulio Berruti and written by Giulio Berruti with Alberto Tarallo. It is an intriguing Nunsplotation film as it mixes the genre with Giallo and is marked by



Nuns out of control in Killer Nun.

excellent performances all round and a rather impressive rock score.

It features the beautiful Anita Ekberg as Sister Gertrude, who is recovering from serious surgery. Sister Gertrude soon finds she cannot cope and becomes addicted to pain killers and begins to spiral out of control. She expels Dr. Patrick Roland and subdues Sister Matthieu by initiating a lesbian relationship with her. Now bringing the hospital under her total control, all hell breaks loose.

She inflicts humiliating calisthenics on a group of elderly patients and stomps on an old woman's dentures. When she finds an old man having sex with a nurse she throws him out a window! On one hand she reads torturous accounts of the lives of the Saints to the patients, while on the other she regularly slips into town for booze and any sort of sex she can get.

As the body count rises, the Mother Superior puts the blame at the feet of the now psychotic Sister Gertrude. But is she really responsible or is someone covering their tracks and trying to frame her for the various murders.

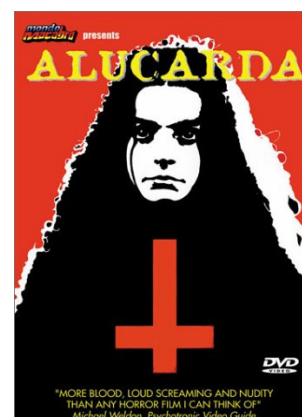
A person of some significance in regards to Nunsplotation is Nigel Wingrove of Redemption films, England. His first film was *Visions of Ecstasy* (1989) which was the first movie banned in the UK on the grounds of Blasphemy. In it he explored Saint Teresa of Ávila caressing the



body of Jesus on the cross as she becomes aroused and inflamed! He later followed this with *Sacred Flesh* (1999). Many of the current titles distributed by Salvation films are Nunsplotation. Salvation's Satanic Sluts range includes nuns in a range of fetishistic depictions. (Salvation Films: <http://salvation-films.com>)

Nunsplotation is not isolated to "Euro trash" cinema and is found across cultures. There are quite a few titles from Mexico including *Satanico Pandemonium*, Gilberto Martinez Solares (1975), *Alucarda*, Juan López Moctezuma (1978) and from Poland, such as *Behind the Convent Walls* aka *Interno di un convent* Walerian Borowczyk (1978).

Alucarda is a prime example of Mexican Nunsplotation, Directed by Juan Lopez Moctezuma and released in 1978, there is a superb DVD edition from Mondo Macabro. *Alucarda* is a very adult work of horror entertainment which looks like a cross between a Ken Russell film and *The Exorcist*. It is wickedly entertaining, surreal and full of excessive scenes. It has bizarre, humorous and definitely blasphemous dialogue and a heavily sexualised approach to Nunsplotation.



One may suppose that the prime locations for Nunsplotation films would be where Catholi-



Mexican anti-clericalism in Alucarda .

cism is the most influential and generally this is correct. There is one unusual exception, Japan. While in Japan Catholicism is a minority religion, there is an obsession with fetishism and hence the imagery of school girls and nuns is used in a highly sexualised manner. The Nunsplottation films of Japan are usually marked by their explicitness and emphasis on sado-masochism, bondage and related shenanigans.

Classic titles include Norifumi Suzuki's *School of the Holy Beast* (1974), Nobuaki Shirai's *Nun Story: Frustration in Black* (1980) and Mamoru Watanabe's *Rope of Hell: A Nun's Story* (1981). Japan has also produce a wide range of Hentai (adult anime) titles featuring Nunsplottation themes, a prime example being the anime series *Dark Chapel* (2006) aka *Seikoujiyo Sei Kojo*.



Nunsplottation continues to be a significant theme within the exploitation genre today, an excellent example being *Run, Bitch, Run* (2009).

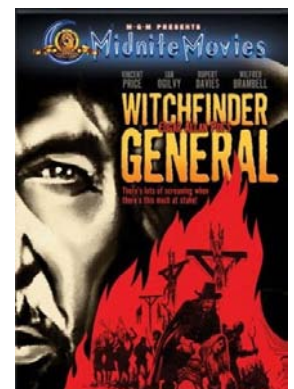
Run, Bitch, Run is an amalgam of exploitation themes include rape-revenge, catholic school girls and Nuns. While it is not



Witch burning in Witchfinder General

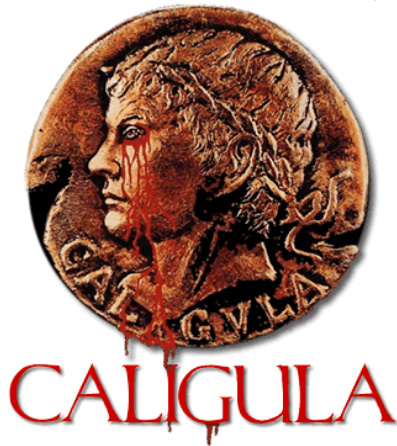
an explicitly Nunsplottation film, since one of the major characters constantly watches Nunsplottation films and the focus is on two Catholic school girls it gets pretty damn close.

History has always been a goldmine for exploitation content. The inquisition and witch-finding have been well mined in such films as *Mark of the Devil* (1970) and *Witchfinder General* (1968). *Witchfinder General* is a British horror film directed by Michael Reeves and starring Vincent Price, Ian Ogilvy, and Hilary Dwyer. It was a low budget film coproduced by Tigon British Film and American International Pictures. It documents the witch-hunting exploits of Matthew Hopkins, a seventeenth century English religious extremist who claimed to have been appointed as a "Witch-finder General" by Parliament during the English Civil War to root out witchcraft.



Vincent Price in Witchfinder General

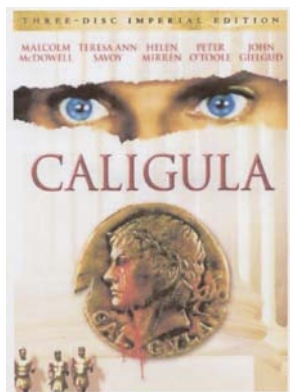
Reeves wanted to make the film as realistic as possible and included realistic torture and extreme violence in many scenes. While it was not well received by the critics or audience of the period it is now considered an important horror exploitation classic. Sadly Reeves died from a drug overdose at the age of 25.



Rome

Ancient Rome, especially in the time of Caligula, is an absolute boon for exploitation cinema, offering sex, violence and debauchery in a single storyline. The most celebrated film in the genre is *Caligula* (1979). Roberto Rossellini wrote the original treatment for *Caligula* about 1972. It was then revised and expanded by Gore Vidal. Bob Guccione of Penthouse financed the film and it was directed by Italian erotic filmmaker Tinto Brass. There were major clashes between Brass and Guccione throughout the shooting of the film. So after filming was completed Guccione snuck back onto the sets with a bevy of Penthouse Pets and filmed new sequences.

Legal action ensued and Vidal and Brass demanded their names be removed from the film. As the dust settled the "Penthouse" version of *Caligula* was born. The film was not an immediate success; loathed by critics, savaged by moralists and censored in many countries it certainly had its problems. It was a slow burner but developed a cult following. A three DVD edition of the film, restored with extra footage (The Imperial Edition) has been released in the



Malcolm McDowell as Caligula

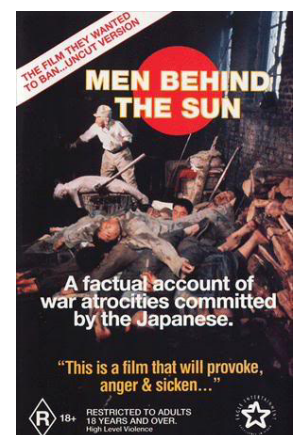
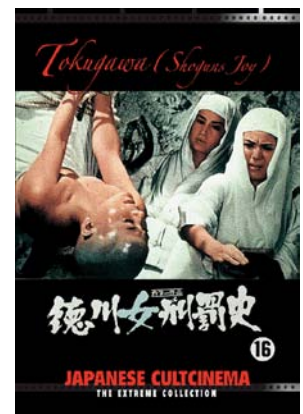
U.S. It is still banned in Australia.

As could be expected the success of *Caligula* triggered a flood of similar films including *Caligula and Messalina* (1981) by Bruno Mattei, *Caligula 2: The Untold Story* (1981), *Orgies of Caligula* (1984) *Roma L'antica chiave dei sensi*, *Caligula Reincarnated as Nero* (1982) and *Caligula's Slaves* (1985).

Japan has not escaped the trend towards historical exploitation cinema either with *Shogun's Sadism: Inferno of Torture* (1969), *Shogun's Joy of Torture* (1968) and other titles by Teruo Ishii exploiting its early traditions. While *Man Behind the Sun* (1988) was based on Squadron 731, who grotesquely tortured and experimented on to test subjects using biological weapons.

Japan has a specialised genre of the eroto-grotesque which combines sex, horror and extreme imagery would could also be placed within the exploitation genre.

Pink Cinema (Eigu) is another unique form of Japanese erotica which has exploitation cinema elements, you can read our feature on the subject in our last issue.





Scene from *Thriller: A Cruel Picture*

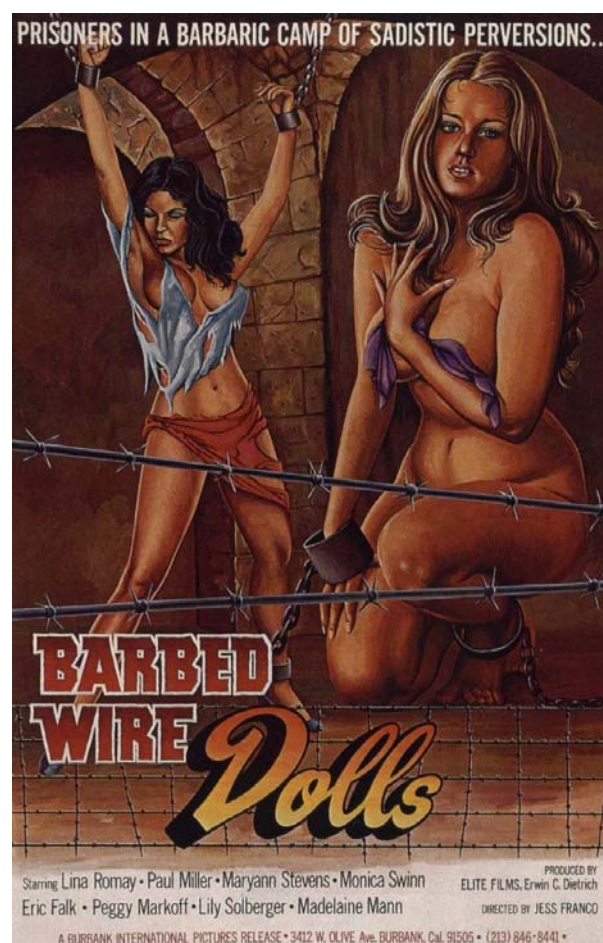
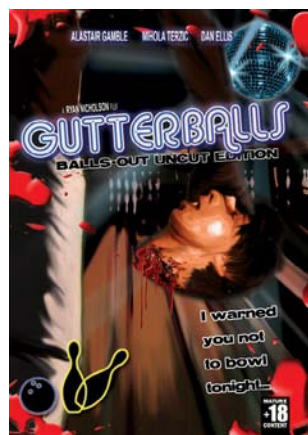
Rape and Revenge Films

Rape and Revenge films are a very controversial sub-genre. While the classic *The Last House on the Left* (1972) includes elements of the genre, film historians credit *Thriller a Cruel Picture* (1974) as the earliest film in the genre. It is a controversial film with such explicit imagery that it has been heavily censored and released as *Thriller: They Call Her One Eye* (1974) to reach a broader market.



I spit on your Grave (1978) is the best known title in this field and is an extremely powerful film with a prolonged rape scene but even more brutal revenge sequences. A more mainstream example of this genre is *Lipstick* (1976) while *Ms.45* (1981) is a more classic exploitation style rape-revenge title about Thana, a mute woman who becomes a spree killer after she is raped twice in one day when coming home from work.

A more recent addition to the genre is *Gutterballs* (2008) which is a horror comedy with a brutal rape revenge theme. It pushes the censorship envelope by including explicit sex in its "balls-out" edition.



Women in Prison

Women in Prison films emerged in the Seventies and became a very popular form of exploitation cinema. They combine a range of exploitation elements including domination, bondage, lesbianism, crime, prison life and so on. Their plots feature imprisoned women who are subjected to all manner of sexual, emotional and physical abuse, typically by sadistic prison wardens. Required scenes include shower scenes, lesbian action, cat fights, sexual abuse by guards (male and female) and the climatic escape.

Many of the "cautionary" films of the Fifties warned of the evils of prison life such as *Caged* (195) and *Women's Prison* (1955). However it was only in the Seventies that exploitation became the prime focus.

The most well-known





Scene from *Sadomania*

examples are such films as *Chained Heat* (1974), *The Big Doll House* (1971), *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), *The Arena* (1973), and *Women in Cages* (1971).

Euro W.I.P. films pushed the envelope further with many including explicit sex, classic titles include *Sadomania* (1981), *99 Women* (1969), *Women in Cellblock 9* (1977), *Barbed Wire Girls* (1975) by Jess Franco, *Violence in a Women's Prison* (1982) by Bruno Mattei and *Women's Prison Massacre* (1983) by Joe D'Amato.

Lesbian and Gay Themes

From the earliest days of exploitation cinema sexual variation has proved of interest. Most Mondo films include some references to gays, transvestites and the mandatory sex-change operation.

The earliest depiction of homosexuality was seen in *Anders als die Andern* (1919, Germany) aka *Different From the Others*, Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Michael* (1924), and William Dieterle's *Sex in Chains* (1928). In Hollywood between 1890 and the 1930s the depiction of homosexuality was either negative or in the form of ridicule. The Sissy was a great target since he was not perceived as a threat to masculinity.

Due to the Hays code of the 1930s, which banned any depiction of homosexuality, homosexuality became "invisible" until the Sixties except in underground cinema. *Boys in the Band*



(1970) and *Pink Narcissus* (1971) were significant gay titles, while there is much debate about the exploitation/negative imagery of *Boys in the Band*.



Scene from *Boys in the Band* (1970), Friedkin later went on to direct the equally controversial *Cruising* (1980).

The first major film exploring transvestism is *Glen or Glenda* by Ed Wood (1958). While they were many films on drag before, this film explored the subject in a more explicit manner.

Many documentaries explore gender re-assignment surgery in an exploitative manner but films such as *The Christine Jorgensen Story* (1970) and *Myra Breckinridge* (1970) moved into new territory. *Let Me Die a Woman* (1978) is certainly considered the most exploitative film ever made on the subject, directed by the sex-ploitation director Doris Wishman.

Blaxploitation

Blaxploitation was originally a derogative term chosen by black rights organisations to characterise films which they believed exploited black people through stereotypes.

At the same time a large number of black people believed that such films, which began in the 1970's with *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* and *Shaft*, actually allowed black people to see themselves represented on screen for the first time in roles which were relevant for an urban black audience. These movies included honest, if not at times exaggerated and perhaps even stereotyped, coverage of drugs, sex and violence, as well as a commentary on the harsh relationship between the black community and the police.

Blaxploitation includes several types of films, including crime (*Foxy Brown*, *Coffy* etc.), action and crime (*Three the Hard Way*, *Shaft*), horror (*Abby* – a strange and quirky Exorcist rip-off), comedy (*Uptown Saturday Night*) and a few others. At first these were films which were made by "blacks for blacks" with a soundtrack packed with soul music.

However as time went on Hollywood saw that a buck could be made and moved in on the act and a wide range of filmmakers took to the genre.

It was at this stage that many of the films to become loaded with negative stereotypes. These range from a strong emphasis on ghetto culture with its prostitutes, pimps and drug dealers as

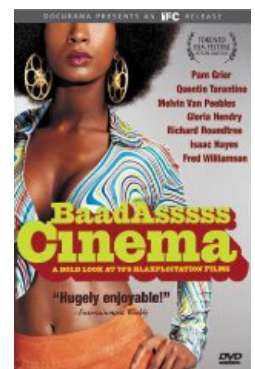


well as a focus on violence and a nearly uniform portrayal of white authorities and police as corrupt.

It was during this period that a major controversy over Blaxploitation began. While audiences flocked to them and even the film industry gave them rave reviews, conservative power brokers within the black community took terrible offense.

The battle lines were drawn and in many cases the actors and actresses were treated as pariahs in their own communities. Newspaper columns were written, protests were held and Hollywood got nervous. In the end this clash caused the end of the golden age of Blaxploitation which went from around 1970 to 1976.

Filmmaker Isaac Julien's documentary *BaadAs-ssss Cinema: A Bold Look at 70s Blaxploitation Films* (Docorama R1 DVD) is an intelligent multifaceted examination of the Blaxploitation genre. It examines it from the perspective of cinema, history, black rights and the personal stories of those involved. It packs a lot into a doco which runs a shade under an hour.





Cheech and Chong

Dope Cinema

Dope Cinema began with the cautionary films of the Fifties which were so strident in their message that they became self-parody. Indeed the most famous, *Reefer Madness* (1936) became a musical in 2005 celebrating the insanity of these early films. The general trajectory of dope cinema involves two friends who possess, are attempting to possess, or are trying to keep hold of marijuana and have some task to complete while evading authorities and sometimes criminals as well. The best known are the Cheech and Chong films (1978-1985) *Up in Smoke* (1978) and *Nice Dreams* (1981) being the most notable.

There are many others including the Harold & Kumar films *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004) and *Harold & Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008).

While most countries have their exploitation cinema history, Australia developed a thriving industry due to special rebates offered by the government for the film industry. While this only lasted for a short time it gave birth to a unique genre of exploitation, Ozploitation. One of the most comprehensive guides to Ozploitation is the documentary *Not Quite Hollywood* (Madman 2009).

Not Quite Hollywood is the ultimate guilty pleasure, it is a fast-paced doco made by Mark Hartley which is not only a homage to cult cinema but to Hartley's superb direction and editing style. He utilises a library of rare footage to produce an unforgettable experience.

It is a doco which has the punch and style of an action film - filled to the brim with movie clips, action shots, nudity, explosions, violence, more



The wild, untold story of OZploitation!

nudity, interviews, kung fu and more nudity - it is an orgiastic banquet of 70s and 80s films. There are just so many cult classics which have been long forgotten which are now discussed in this truly affectionate yet irreverent celebration.

Australian genre films are those we may so often remember but pretend not to. While the art and period epics of Australian cinema were heralded as great masterpieces, these were the films that were lambasted by the critics but adored by the public and loved at the late night sessions of the local drive in.

They were reviled in the press, debated in the parliament, threatened by the censors and yet loved by both the counter-culture and the movie-going public.

Ranging from sex romps such as *Alvin Purple* and *Stork* to the crass humour of *Barry McKenzie* and his first technicolour yawn on screen.



Alvin Purple: An uniquely Aussie sex romp

From the action classics such as *Mad Max* and the *Man from Kong Kong* to offensive splatter classics such as *Turkey Shoot*, they are all here, remembered in their wild abandon and show in all their midnight glory.



It would be hard to list all the films covered but some include *Patrick*, *Thirst*, *Turkey Shoot*, *Stone*, *BMX Bandits*, *The Long Weekend*, *Mad Max*, *Fantasm*, *Howling III: The Marsupials*, *Mad Dog Morgan*, *Barry MacKenzie*, *Stork*, *Number 96* and lots and lots more. The director clearly has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Australia genre cinema of all sorts—biker, action, sex, cult, horror, comedy, splatter and exploitation.

Interspersed throughout this journey into the underbelly of cinema is a wide range of interviews ranging from such lovers of the medium as Quentin Tarantino, Richard Franklin, Dennis Hopper, Barry Humphries and George Miller to its staunchest critics in the like of Bob Ellis and Phillip Adams. Quentin Tarantino is especially memorable with his colourful dialogue, offhand comments and obvious adoration for the genre.

There is also a serious side to *Not Quite Hollywood* as it explores the censorship row that occurred during the 70s and 80s and which still raises its ugly head today.

A nice collection of original Ozploitation films are available from Umbrella Entertainment in their two Ozploitation collections.

Ozploitation Volume 1 includes *Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, *Turkey Shoot*, *The Naked Bunyip*, *Road Games*, *Harlequin*, *Night of Fear* and *Inn of the Damned*.



Ozploitation Volume 2 includes *Stone*, *Razorback*, *The True Story of Eskimo Nell*, *Long Weekend*, *Fantasm* and *Fantasm Comes Again* and *The Chain Reaction*.



Cinematic Contraband is such a wide and diverse

genre it is hard to cover the diversity of the field.

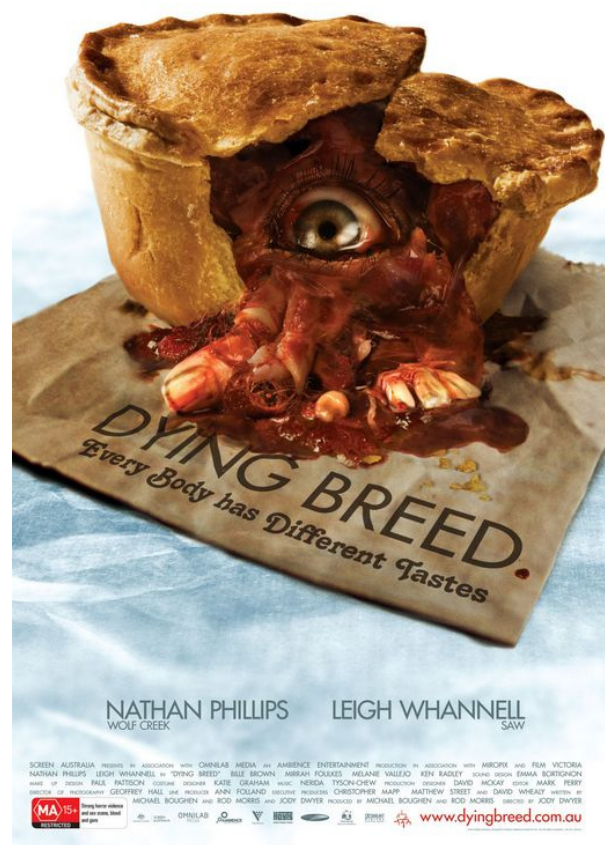
There are dwarf exploitation films such as *The Sinful Dwarf* 1973/Severin 2009, Chambara films (which are non-traditional Samurai films) such as *Shogun Assassin* (1980) and *Hanzo the Razor* (1972, 3 and 4) and many, many others.

Some critics would even put *Cannibal*, *Giallo* and extreme horror into this genre. This is certainly not meant to be a comprehensive article. You could write many books on the subject and still not scratch the surface, but we do hope we have piqued your interest.

Is there is a future for such films ?

Absolutely ! With the advent of indie films more and more creative exploitation titles are being made. From *Dead Girl* (2009) with its powerful exploitation/horror film to *Run! Bitch ! Run!* (2009) and Australian nunsplotation film *Dark Habits* (2009). There is the cult exploitation horror *I Know How Many Runs You Scored Last Summer* (2008) which features a mad murderous cricketer and *Dying Breed* (2008) which combines the tale of a Tasmanian convict with a modern cannibal story.

There is a lot of life in this genre yet..

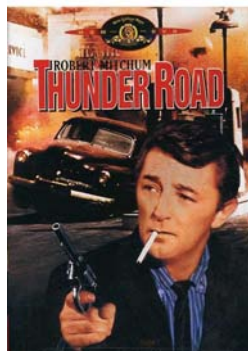




Almost since the first days of film the motor car featured as a useful prop, especially in comedies. In the early silent movies cars were blown up, run off cliffs or through buildings, or crashed. Director Mack Sennett excelled at filming this type of stunt and a car chase became a standard part of his silent films. This tradition has carried on through many American films since then. Although many films showed some very dangerous and illegal driving, they were done as comedies so in the eyes of the viewing public it was acceptable behaviour. It took a while, but gradually an antisocial element crept into the use of cars in film.

Cars and Illegal Use

Robert Mitchum's *Thunder Road* (1958) about moonshine running in America's deep south was one of the first post-war films to reopen the genre. Here were the fast cars, guns and stunts that Americans wanted to see in their cinemas. This time, though, the cars were used to support moonshine running. This may have been unacceptable in real life, but cinema was just make-believe. It's still probably the best moonshine-running film ever made.



A darker film that should have verged on the unacceptable was Stanley Kramer's 1959 post-apocalypse film *On The Beach*. The world has been overtaken by a spreading cloud of radioactive dust from a nuclear war. Some of the last people alive are left in Melbourne, with no hope of surviving the



cloud of radiation. Some choose to "celebrate" their final days with a car race. With nothing to lose the race turns into a desperate attempt at automotive suicide for the drivers. In modern days it would be withdrawn on the grounds of its unacceptable themes, but in those days with the threat of atomic war looming it all made sense in a dreadfully black sort of way.

The antisocial use of the car didn't get much more attention until the 1971 film *Vanishing Point*. Apart from a lot of speeding and stunts the film also had the driver taking drugs to stay awake. The format was much the same as comedies like *Gumball Rally*, involving an apparent need to drive across the United States in the shortest possible time regardless of road safety, police or speed laws. So much for the plot, now on with the action. It wasn't a great film but it certainly started to take car films in a more ominous direction.

Street racing may have been illegal but on film at least it seems to have been tolerated – perhaps as a mild form of rebellion against an increasingly active and heavy-handed police force. Steve McQueen's car chase through the San Francisco hills in *Bullitt* managed to combine both police work and desperate car chases. It was bettered in 1971 by a race between a commandeered car and a train in *The French Connection*.

Even the British James Bond films managed a good car stunt or two in each film. The most spectacular was the corkscrewing car supposedly jumping across a broken bridge featured in *The Man With The Golden Gun* (1974)

A somewhat better attempt was made in 1980 with the *Blues Brothers*.





Blues Brothers

Although it was meant to be a comedy it featured some of the most antisocial attitudes to the police and highway rules ever filmed. It had all the right ingredients – a beat-up ex-police cruiser as the “hero” car, dozens of police cars chasing them and crashing all over the place, and Jake and Elwood’s casual attitude to the speed laws and other peoples’ property. The stunts never ended and it even had some pretty good music. The sight of the beaten-up old police car outracing the newer, shiny police cars would gladden your heart. It was definitely funny

(if hard to classify) and it quite rightly became a cult film.

It also emphasised the strange love-hate relationship between Hollywood and cars – Hollywood felt safer if the stunts, crashes, and lawbreaking were part of a comedy, but the public liked them regardless. Perhaps there is just a little of the rebel lawbreaker in each driver?

Paris is a small town in rural Australia. Its people make their living by staging car accidents to unsuspecting travellers. They then sell off the parts, luggage and any other valuables from the wrecks. This sets the scene for Australian director Peter Weir’s *The Cars That Ate Paris* (1974). Apart from the murderous citizens the town has problems with the youth who are becoming dissatisfied with the status quo, insurance investigators who have noticed the increase in fatal crashes in the Paris area, and the increasing number of brain-damaged patients (“veggies”) filling the local hospital. The catalyst for change is Arthur, a mild mannered young man who is adopted by the Mayor after his brother is killed in an “accident”. Arthur comes to suspect that there is more to the road accidents than meets the eye.





The Truck from *Duel*

There is a revolution brewing in the town between the oldies who want to keep the status quo and the youth in their heavily modified cars. The film revolves around cars and their illegal use. Weir got the idea for the story when he noticed in a British newspaper that road deaths now got less attention than a crime of passion.

The 1974 car theft film *Gone in 60 Seconds* featured the longest car chase sequence ever put on film. It lasted for forty minutes and in the course of the chase over a hundred cars were trashed. Although it wasn't much of a film (very low budget) it gave the public what they wanted – chases and crashes. A better-funded remake in 2000 frankly didn't improve much on the original.

The Car As An Anti-Hero

In 1971 fledgling director Steven Spielberg re-

leased a made-for-TV film that really set the style for future dark car films. *Duel* was the ultimate road rage film and featured an extended highway battle between a car driver and an old tanker semi-trailer. For ongoing suspense in the car genre it hasn't been beaten yet. The anonymity of the truck driver only added to the terror – the truck was left to develop a personality of its own, and an evil one at that. Surprisingly the film was rather low on the stunts that had become de rigeur for car films. This was probably a result of its low budget. It was no less effective, though.

The Car As A Weapon

In 1979 another Australian director, George Miller, released the micro-budget *Mad Max*. Set in the near future it shows a world of motor anarchy where biker gangs rule the highways and the police have had to become just as antisocial and savage to stop them. As well as the police Pursuit cars there is the Interceptor whose job is to remove the dangerous drivers from the road by any means whatever. Max is a cool and effective Interceptor driver (quite the opposite of the rest of the gung-ho cops) and the story starts with a duel between him and an escapee biker. Max turns to revenge when his family is killed by the biker gang, who are themselves seeking revenge on him for killing their biker mate in the pursuit. Max's chosen revenge weapon is a supercharged Ford Falcon "Pursuit Special", black and unmarked.

Mad Max is probably still the best example of film using a car as a weapon.

A typical Australian film, *Mad Max* had more enthusiasm than funding. Stunts were done at





Mad Max Interceptor

full speed and in one take where possible. No one was actually killed but there were some near misses. The shot where a pursuit car is driven through a caravan is still one of the more spectacular stunts in car cinema. Miller's low level shots of high speed car action are some of the best ever filmed. Mad Max spawned a number of follow-up films that became increasingly silly but all featured the cars as the main weapon in the film.

One particularly dreadful one was the 1975 *Death Race 2000*, which was more like a sleazy video game with points awarded for killing pedestrians. Why David Carradine and Sylvester Stallone appeared in this turkey defies reason. About its only saving grace is that while antisocial, it's also sometimes slightly funny. I suspect it only got issued without major public protest because no one took it seriously. It was made by the king of B-grade movies, Roger Corman.

In such an antisocial genre it was only natural that director Quentin Tarantino would make an appearance. His over-the-top style was demonstrated in the 2007 film *Death Proof*. In this ra-



Herbie

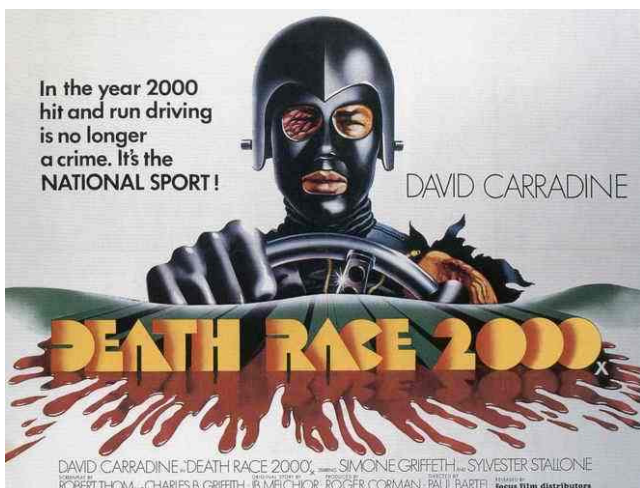
ther obscure production veteran actor Kurt Russell and his powerful stunt car (called "Death Proof") can supposedly survive movie-type stunt crashes. His specialty is taking girls for a ride in the car then staging an "accident" in which the girl is inevitably killed but he survives. The film fits neatly into the "car as a weapon" genre but is relatively unknown.

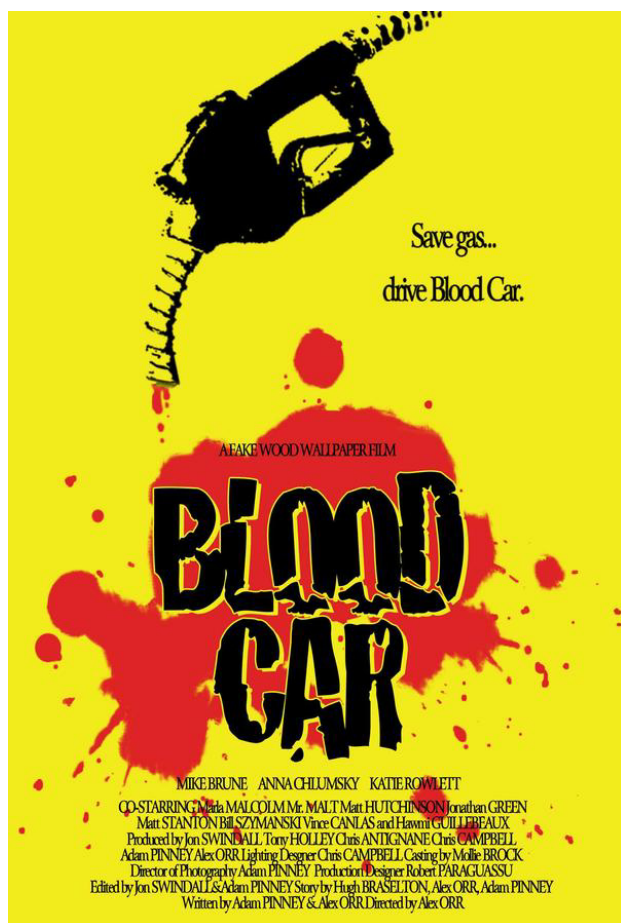
The Car As A Goodie

In 1982 NBC tried to redefine the car in film as a "goodie" in the TV series *Knight Rider*. Glen Larson, the producer, said he "wanted to do the Lone Ranger with a car". KITT, the artificially intelligent car, outacted the main actor, David Hasselhoff. The series ran until 1986.

This may have had more to do with people laughing too much at The Hoff's acting skills to change channels than with any particular dramatic values. Never one to let a bad idea drop, in 1991 NBC released a made-for-TV sequel, *Knight Rider 2000*. Every few years they released yet another sequel until the films had nothing in common with the original idea. They never got much better, either.

Cars continued to be used in "cute" and humorous films like the *Herbie* series (Volkswagen), *The Italian Job* (Mini Cooper), or the many American teen-coming-of-age films like *American Graffiti*. Sometimes the cars were used in antisocial ways, as in Burt Reynolds' *Smokey and the Bandit* or *Cannonball Rally* films but these were just comedies embellished with car chases and stunts, much in the silent movie tradition, and they did not upset the Americans' love for their cars.





Possessed Cars

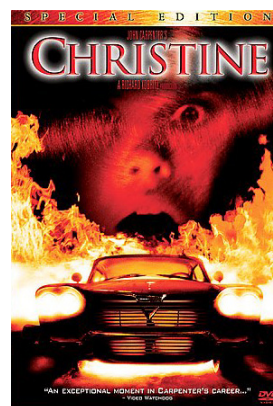
An obscure 2007 production was the independent *Blood Car*. Once again set in the near future, it deals with one young man's attempts to make a substitute fuel. He finds that the best is human blood, and his car readily adapts – just throw a body in the boot and the car does the rest. The Government finds out and he is eventually made an offer he can't refuse.

Blood Car could have been a good little horror film if it wasn't so determined to be a dark comedy. The idea of the U.S.A. being populated by man-eating cars rather appeals to me. Unfortunately the film could not develop much further in this direction due that chronic independent film problem, lack of money. Maybe a sequel is called for? I would like to have seen the car itself developed a little further as well.

Christine, based on a Stephen King novel, features a 1958 Plymouth Fury that is possessed by some sort of evil that allows the car to drive itself, repair itself, and wreak havoc on the roads. Its owner, Arnie, is a socially challenged young man whose personality starts to change for the worse as he lovingly restores the car

and becomes obsessed with her. Unbeknown to his friends, his love for the car is reciprocated. When they separate Arnie from the car for his own good the car turns violent in an orgy of automotive revenge. How do you kill a haunted car?

"She's beautiful, isn't she? I love her. And she loves me"



Producer John Carpenter, himself a master of horror films, seems to have given *Christine* all that he had and added a bit of evil to the car genre. This style of film definitely does not fit into the "car as a penis extension" approach of the average American car film.

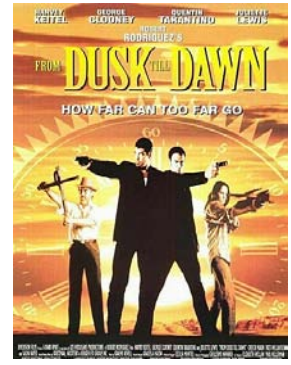
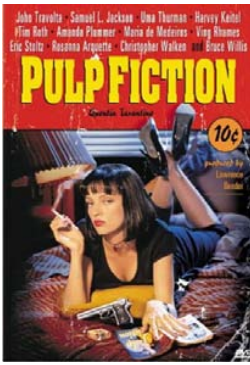
In 1977 a fairly unknown film, *The Car*, was released. A little town in Utah is being terrorised by a mysterious black sedan that is starting to make serious inroads into the town's population. Its action scenes are reminiscent of *Jaws* as it picks off individual victims at first, then goes on a killing rampage. The only safe place is the local cemetery – the car will not drive onto consecrated ground.



The film borrows a little from *Duel* in that we never get to see the driver until the final fiery end, when a demonic shape is seen in the driver's seat through the flames of the burning car.

Cars will continue to feature in film for a long while to come. Even when the petrol runs out there will be a producer out there somewhere who will try to make just one more car film. Failing a miracle new technology, though, the car chases so beloved of the viewers will probably be a thing of the past. Car films will become as quaint and old-fashioned as the Keystone Kops.

Somehow the whine of electric motors just can't replace the thunder of a big V8, but until then there is still plenty of potential for making dark films about cars and their illegal use.



Quentin Tarantino: A Profile

"When people ask me if I went to film school I tell them, 'no, I went to films'"

Tarantino was born in 1963 and spent his early years in Los Angeles. He worked in a video rental store where he could spend much of the day discussing films with like-minded people. It was an interesting time for the movie industry. The Western had just about run its course, the romantic dramas (Doris Day, etc.) were losing ground, and films were becoming more realistic. Increasingly violence was a part of this realism.

He was urged by Lawrence Bender, who recognised his talent, to write a screenplay. He directed and co-wrote a little film called *My Best Friend's Birthday*, which was tragically lost in a fire. The screenplay survived, though. It became the basis for *True Romance*, his first attempt at a movie version of the lurid pulp books and comics of the era.

In 1992 *Reservoir Dogs* was released at the Sundance Film Festival and was widely noticed. It was funded partly by Live Entertainment and partly by Harvey Keitel who had read the screenplay and was impressed. Keitel also helped direct the film, which must have helped the young Tarantino a lot in his future career.

Reservoir Dogs shows how much technique Tarantino had absorbed in his video shop days. He is particularly fond of building up tension and mystery in a plot, then explaining it in a flashback. This is really notable in *Pulp Fiction*, his next film. Another thing that is notable about his films is his loyalty to certain actors. Samuel L Jackson for instance has appeared in four Tarantino films so far. He also formed a close alliance with fellow director / producer Robert Rodriguez. This collaboration has carried on for many years.

Much of the appeal of Tarantino's films lies in their over-the-top nature. He is not frightened to develop a violent theme way past the carefully



sanitised levels of most U.S. dramas, and it is this enthusiasm that makes his work stand out. From his wide viewing experience he is able to pick and choose various techniques that most closely fit the plot. *Kill Bill* for instance draws on a wide range of techniques from spaghetti westerns to Japanese martial arts to Giallo (Italian horror).

As well as the "pulp", Tarantino was strongly influenced by grindhouse films. These were the cheap horror / bikie / thriller films turned out by the hundreds for the backstreet cinemas and, later, the late-night drive-in movie sessions. In *Not Quite Hollywood*, a retrospective of Australian film, he professed to having been strongly influenced by the Australian films of the time. These closely paralleled what he was doing and their low budgets led to an enthusiasm that was missing in the more glossy American productions. A typical feature of these films is their tendency to avoid expensive special effects and simply do it for real.

Has Tarantino slowed down in his maturity?

There have been suggestions that the enthusiasm is now waning. *Inglorious Basterds*, while classic Tarantino, is a project he had been working on since the 1990s. According to the critics it seems a little more restrained than his previous work

In 2009 the British newspaper *The Guardian* reported that Tarantino was looking at Len Deighton's classic Cold War spy trilogy, *Berlin Game / Mexico Set / London Match*. I know and love these books and I think a Tarantino film version could work well, especially with his now more restrained style. Granada Television produced the books as a mini TV series in 1988. It starred Ian Holm as Bernard Samson, the intelligence officer who in his mild-mannered British way managed to fight the Russians, the East Germans, and his own people. A Tarantino version would be interesting. The stories are written in a low-key way that at first don't seem to fit the Tarantino style, but he explains *"One of the things I enjoy musing about doing is the trilogy of Len Deighton books, Berlin Game, Mexico Set and London Match.....The story takes place in the Cold War and follows a spy named Bernard Sampson. What is attractive is the really great characters and the wonderful casting."*

Another future project he has discussed is a spaghetti Western-type "Southern" that will deal with slavery and other issues. He said he wanted *"to do movies that deal with America's horrible past with slavery and stuff but do them like spaghetti westerns, not like big issue movies. I want to do them like they're genre films, but they deal with everything that America has never dealt with because it's ashamed of it, and other countries don't really deal with because they don't feel they have the right to"*.

Let's now have a look at some of the significant films in which he has been involved in one way or another. Remember that these were not all directed by Tarantino – some he wrote, many he directed, some he even acted in. These films, though, will give an idea of his work and why it is so refreshing within the American cinema blandness.

Reservoir Dogs (1992)

This debut film of suspicion and betrayal brought Tarantino to the forefront as a new American director worth watching. It is a brutal film with a lot of blood and killing and would probably cause an outcry nowadays for its excessive violence, but that did not stop Tarantino



from giving us all the gritty detail. It was the profanity and violence that led to many audiences walking out during the showings and the film was only a modest success in the United States. It found its place in Britain, where decades of "gentle" Agatha Christie crime films were now being replaced by more down to earth, heavier gangster films.



The story is of a diamond robbery gone badly wrong. The police were waiting for them, and the hired criminals now meet back at a warehouse as instructed to wait for their employer and find out what happened. While they wait they discuss the crime and suspicion starts to rise that someone in the group may have informed on them. They are all strangers to each other, just hired to do the job, so there is no loyalty or respect between them. It soon turns violent. With veteran actors like Harvey Keitel, Steve Buscemi and Tim Roth, Tarantino had good talent to work with. Despite what could have been a boring plot he builds up the tension and suspicion right to the end.

True Romance (1993)

It's been a long time since I have seen this film and I had forgotten how good it was. The story is simple and along the lines of the "True Romance" – type pulp magazines that Tarantino was – well, not exactly lampooning. He took the style of these stories then added his own over-the-top touch. In the pro-





A scene from True Romance

cess he produced a film that was funny, dramatic, and still romantic.

Clarence (Christian Slater) is a rather dull hard-working young guy whose boss arranges a prostitute for his birthday surprise gift. The girl, Alabama, (Patricia Arquette) is new to the game, and they fall in love. Marriage follows quickly but Clarence is incensed at how Alabama's pimp, Drexel (Gary Oldman) has treated her. He decides to kill Drexel in revenge. The killing becomes a major fight and nearly turns out fatally for Clarence but he kills Drexel and gets away with a case full of heroin, thinking the bag contains Alabama's personal stuff.

The drugs belong to the Mob and were stolen from the Police evidence room by a crooked cop. The Mob want their drugs back and start tracking down Clarence and Alabama, who have left town for Hollywood. Clarence has a friend there who may be able to sell the drugs for him. In a brilliant cameo performance featuring Dennis Hopper as Clarence's dad, the mobsters find out where Clarence is headed. There is a final showdown and a massive gunfight between Clarence, the mobsters, the local drug distributor and the Police – hardly what we would expect in a True Romance novel, but this is a Tarantino film after all.

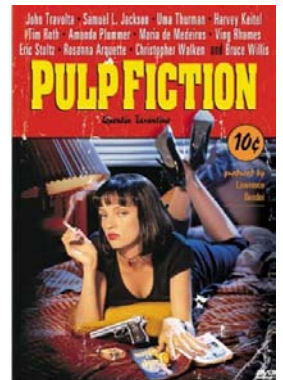
Once again there are many quality actors, even in the minor roles, and Tarantino managed to get the best out of them. I liked Brad Pitt as Clarence's friend's perpetually stoned roommate, and Christopher Walkin was brilliant as the mobster. Even Samuel L Jackson puts in a minor appearance again. This film hasn't so much aged as matured into vintage Tarantino. Incidentally director Tony Scott, with many very ordinary films to his credit, really showed his skills in this film.



Samuel Jackson in Pulp Fiction

Pulp Fiction (1994)

This is the film that really made Tarantino's reputation. There is a number of intertwining plot lines – the ageing boxer Butch (Bruce Willis) looking for a final big payout, the two heavies (John Travolta and Samuel L Jackson) collecting drug money for the local gang boss Marcellus Wallace (Ving Rhames), and the young couple about to hold up a diner (Tim Roth and Amanda Plummer). Their stories progress and get involved with each other in a finely crafted plot that I think has only been equalled by *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. Tarantino not only picked a fine cast to work with, he gave them a script they could really get into. Samuel L Jackson plays the part to perfection of a callous murderer who turns to the Lord. Even the minor characters are played with style, like Harvey Keitel's Mr Wolf (he makes problems like dead bodies just go away) or Uma Thurman (drugged-up wife of Marcellus).

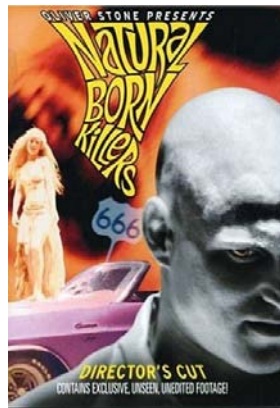


The action was exactly what we had come to expect from Tarantino by now – enthusiastic, fast-moving, over the top, with larger than life characters – just like the trashy pulp magazines the film was named after. There is a lot of mayhem, rough humour and suggestive sexual content.

Pulp Fiction was to American crime what the spaghetti western was to the Wild West. It's still one of Tarantino's best films.

Natural Born Killers (1994)

This film was produced by Oliver Stone from a Tarantino story. I found it disappointing and although I saw it when it was released I haven't bothered to watch it since. Part of the reason was the constant relentless swearing. Another major defect, if that's what it was, is the gross fascination and celebration of the media of two people who are as pitiful as they are reprehensible, and the gullibility and feeding frenzy that the media audience gets into. In a way it's a really insightful and cutting satire of America, the media, and people in general.



Tarantino usually manages to show some redeeming features in his characters, minor though it may be. Oliver Stone seemed to miss this. Instead he concentrated on the sensational nature of the plot rather than the subtle Tarantino-esque character development.

Although the slaughter and bloodshed is everything a splatter fan could ask for, I couldn't help thinking that Tarantino himself could have done it better.

Dusk Til Dawn (1996)

Tarantino's strangest film. It starts out conventionally enough. Seth and Richard Gecko (George Clooney and Quentin Tarantino) hold up a bank. It is a bloody holdup and they get away with the money and a hostage. As they kill their way south towards Mexico they realise they will never get across the border unless they change vehicles, so they hijack a Winnebago driven by Jacob Fuller (Harvey Keitel) and his two kids. With the family for camouflage they get into Mexico and head for a criminals' hangout called the Titty Twister which they reach at dusk.



Here we have a wonderful, funny performance by Cheech Marin as the manager, but beneath



A scene from Dusk Til Dawn

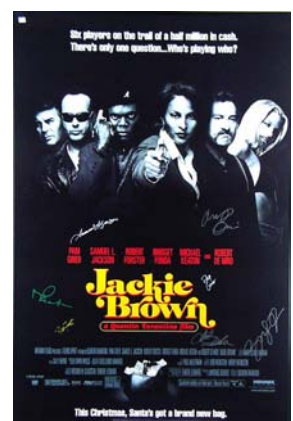
the humour the bar hides a dark secret.

Now the film takes a strange turn. One of the brothers is injured and at the sight of blood most of the bar regulars turn into vampires and attack the other patrons. It's a long fight for survival until sunlight chases the vampires away. Up to this point the film has been conventional Tarantino with a fair bit of blood but during the bar scenes he really excelled.

Tarantino wrote the screenplay from a Robert Kurtzman story and turned it into one of the most original vampire films I have seen. He also turned in a surprisingly good performance as the homicidal Richard Gecko. Robert Rodriguez directed it superbly, and he and Tarantino were to produce other action films together.

Jackie Brown (1997)

Having now "done" vampires, Tarantino turned to the Blaxploitation genre. He wrote a screenplay based on a book by Elmore Leonard and directed a film that is a complete change of pace from his earlier more bloody work. Being cool is more important than being violent, although gunrunner Ordell Robbie (yes, it's Samuel L Jackson again) puts it as



"....the AK47 - when you absolutely positively gotta kill every motherfucker in the room - accept no substitute."

Ordell's partner is selling guns to criminals in



Mexico and down-on-her-luck airline stewardess Jackie Brown (Pam Grier) is smuggling the money into America for him. The Feds catch up with her with a bag full of money but it's Ordell that they want. They make her a deal - help them and the money charge will be dropped. Meanwhile Jackie is imprisoned until she can raise bail. Ordell arranges bail through Max Cherry (Robert Forster), a lonely, middle-aged man who finds he has feelings for Jackie.

Jackie is concerned that Ordell might think she had something to do with the Feds finding out about his money operation. If he has any suspicion about her part in it he will kill her. She is right, but she is able to put Ordell off by threatening him with a gun borrowed from Max Cherry. She is now the meat in the sandwich. She can face a prison term for money laundering or face death from Ordell. Her only help is Max.

Ordell now intends to get a large amount of his money into the U.S. but he doesn't trust Jackie, so he arranges a switch of couriers – Jackie will bring in the money and hand it over to another girl before the Feds can trace it to Ordell. Jackie knows the Feds will blame her and she will go to prison, so with Max's help she arranges another plan that will leave her in the clear and set the Feds and Ordell onto each other. Jackie must find someone who is meaner than Ordell



Jackie Brown: An Ode to Blaxploitation

to kill him before he kills her. Will it work? Jackie is a tough woman, tougher than they think, but is she good enough to handle bent cops and a killer?

There is much less violence than usual for Tarantino. As a result the film was not as popular as some of his other films, but I found the laid-back style rather appealing. It gave the actors more time to develop their characters and their performances were superb. Even Robert de Niro, who makes a minor appearance as Ordell's ex-bank robber jail mate, manages to make his character a "real" person. I didn't think Robert de Niro did minor roles but his skills show through. That's the real plus about this film – Tarantino showed he can direct characters, not just action.



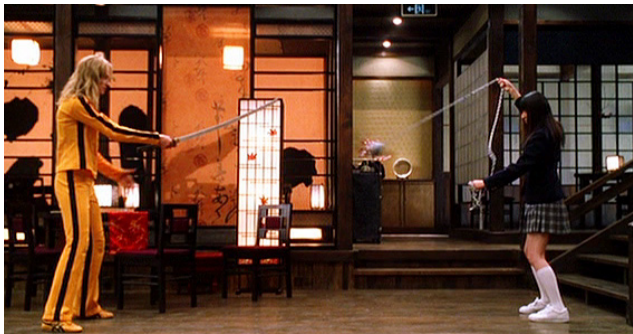
Kill Bill 1 & 2 (2003/4)

These are undoubtedly Tarantino's bloodiest films. The death toll must be in the hundreds. It is a well-crafted revenge epic that gave Uma Thurman a chance to pose regularly with big swords and incidentally to show she can act. There are elements of comic book fantasy, martial arts, even a touch of the spaghetti western.

Bill (David Carradine) is in charge of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, a group of four



Carradine and Thurman in Kill Bill



A scene from the Kill Bill series

highly-skilled female killers. Things fall apart for him when Uma leaves the group and is about to get married. She is pregnant to Bill but has found a country boy who loves her as she is. The Assassination Squad turns up at a wedding rehearsal and slaughters everybody. Bill personally shoots Uma in the head. We will not find out why until the end of the second film.

He doesn't kill Uma but she is in a coma for four years. Her baby is delivered and Bill takes the baby girl as his own offspring and brings her up. When Uma comes out of her coma she assumes the baby died in the slaughter. She now sets out for revenge on every member of the squad, and then finally Bill.

The story brings in martial arts, swordplay, a secret punch that can explode a victim's heart and as much blood as you could want. The fight scenes are bloody and extended (probably unnecessarily so). For the American version many of the violent scenes were converted to black and white to reduce their impact, but most of the overseas versions were in full colour. Uma is shot, slashed and buried alive as she carves her way through her one-time partners before she finally meets Bill once more – and finds the daughter she thought was dead.

I was rather surprised at David Carradine's performance. I have not regarded him highly as an actor, but in Kill Bill he shows a quiet sympathy that lifts his performance to one of the better ones in the films. There are many wonderful cameo characters but even they do not really justify the drawn-out fight scenes. This, however, is the only reservation I have about Kill Bill.

In an interview on Italian TV in 2009 Tarantino let slip that there is a third Kill Bill in his plans, probably to be released in 2014. There may also be a single-film edit of the two earlier films.



Kurt Russell as a serial killer who murders by using his car

Death Proof (2007)

A violent and rather obscure film about stalking and highway carnage. Stuntman Mike (Kurt Russell) is a loner who talks a good story about having been a leading stunt man, but doesn't appear to have actually appeared in any known film. He is a predator, picking up women in his powerful



"stunt car" (the "Death Proof" of the story). Although he seems to believe that the car makes him invincible, in the "accidental" car crashes that he stages the girls are inevitably killed. The story starts with one such killing. The police are suspicious but can't prove anything against him.

Some years later he is at it again in a new part of the country. This time he picks the wrong girls. One is herself a stunt woman and knows how to prepare for safe stunts. Another carries a gun. Has Stuntman Mike met his match? The finale is gruesome and bloody.

The film stars many of Tarantino's regular stable of actors like Rose McGowan and Marley Shelton, and Tarantino makes his (by now) customary brief appearance. The film was released in the United States as a double with Planet Terror to give the audiences an approximation of the double horror bills shown at the grindhouse cinemas. Although Tarantino's name ap-



Amputee Machine Gun - cool !

pears prominently on the film, much of the production work was done once again by his friend Robert Rodriguez.

Planet Terror (2007)

Robert Rodriguez is also responsible for this zombie spectacular. Tarantino's contribution was as coproducer and even as an actor in minor parts (rapist soldier, zombie eating roadkill). In an interview in the extras Rodriguez and Tarantino discuss their close association over the years and they are obviously of like minds when it comes to film. Rodriguez would run parts of his storyline and script past Tarantino (they had adjacent offices at Columbia) and the film is stronger for their collaboration.



Rodriguez also set out to emulate the grind-

house films that he and Tarantino loved, and the footage has been tweaked to reflect this – scratches, grain, and projector problems. He even uses this to play a joke on the audience when the compulsory “we’re all going to die so let’s have sex” scene comes up. All the clichés are there from the slow, shambling zombies to the evil scientist. There is also a spoof trailer for a film that never existed. It is so fantastic that it really should be made.

The story itself is fairly conventional with the usual accidental release of the zombie virus from the secret army base, the local civilians unable to cope, and an ensuing excess of blood and splatter scenes. It may be conventional but is very well done and in many places quite funny in a black humour sort of way.

There are a couple of brilliant if farcical ideas like the young gogo dancer who loses her leg and has a gun grafted on instead. Her athletic dance moves make it easy for her to kill large numbers of soldiers and zombies. The zombies learn to infect others by popping their pus-filled buboes and smearing the contents on their victims (particularly revolting).

We see the familiar faces of actors like Bruce Willis, Rose McGowan, and Josh Brolin. There is even a cameo appearance by Cheech Marin as a zombie-killing priest. A great film ? No. Great entertainment? Definitely. The two films were received without much enthusiasm at the box office, possibly because zombies and slashers had now become rather overdone.

That does not stop them being important examples of the genres, though.



The marvellously gory Planet Terror



The eccentric Dennis Hopper from Hell Ride

Scene from *Hell Ride* (2008)**Hellride (2008)**

Since Tarantino produced films about every other genre, why not bikers? This is his homage to the grindhouse biker gang movies. There is more than a little of the Wild West in the film as well as the sex, violence and motorbikes. Rather than just repeat what had already been done, Larry Bishop's story brings the genre up to date. Many of the bikers are now getting old and have just about "retired". Their place has been taken by younger bikers, but still with the same bad-ass attitudes. This may be partly the reason for the film's comparative lack of success. Unlike the bikers, the audiences are getting younger and many don't remember the old Hells Angels bike gang films and their antisocial attitudes. Without this background for a context the film seems rather isolated in modern times.



The main characters are Pistolero (Larry Bishop), The Deuce (David Carradine), The Gent (Michael Madsen), Billy Wings (Vinnie Jones) and a host of other bikers, as well as the mysterious Cherokee Kisum (Julia Jones). Her background is unknown at the start of the story but she seems to have a major part in its development. There is no love lost between many of the protagonists and despite their advancing age a day of reckoning is coming for some of them. This will, naturally, involve lots of blood.

It must be said that the acting is not great. The

actors could have done better, but the script is rather clichéd in the pointless style of the earlier films so they have nowhere to go with character development. All they really have to do is look tough and menacing. This is unusual for a Tarantino film but since Bishop did the directing and Tarantino did the production, it is a result of the differing styles of the two men. It also reflects Tarantino's changing production values over the years. It's almost as if his audiences came to expect lots of blood so he gave that to them, at the expense of some of the other qualities he put into his early films. Would it have been better had he directed it as well, instead of Bishop?

Inglorious Basterds (2009)

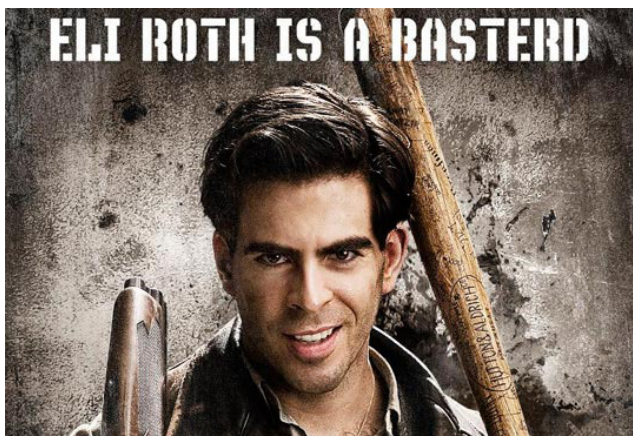
Tarantino's remake of Enzo Castellari's *The Inglorious Bastards* (1978) pays homage to over-the-top Italian war classics. In many ways these were Westerns in the form of war films. Tarantino has moulded it all into a cult extravaganza



It is 1941 in German-occupied France. Colonel Hans Landa of the SS is searching for a missing Jewish family. He is well dressed, stylish, witty even urbane, but brutal. He slaughters a Jewish family hiding under a farmhouse but the teenage daughter Shosanna escapes.

First Lieutenant Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt) is a hard man. He has a team of eight American Jewish

**Brad Pitt as Lt. Aldo Raine in *Inglorious Basterds***



soldiers to parachute into occupied France. They slaughter as many German soldiers as possible, leaving an occasional individual alive (with a Swastika carved on his forehead) to tell others of their ordeal. They are so successful that the legend of one of their number, the Jew Bear, spreads and many German soldiers believe he is supernatural.

Shosanna wants revenge. She lives under a false identity in Paris running a cinema with her lover, Marcel. She meets Frederick Zoller who is a film lover, but he is also a German marksman and war hero who has been immortalised by Goebbels in a new propaganda film. Zoller tries to woo her and won't take no for an answer. He convinces Goebbels to hold the premiere of the film at Shosanna's theatre. This is her chance for revenge.

The British have also learned of the premiere and want in on the action. They do not know about Shosanna's plan, so they come up with one of their own involving an English agent and the Basterds. They send arrogant film critic Lieutenant Archie Hicox to Paris to lead the mission. They meet double agent Bridget von



Leaving a permanent reminder (with a carved swastika) in *Inglourious Basterds*

Hammersmark who will get them into the event as film buffs. Things soon come unstuck. Hicox, arrogant and cocky, overplays his cards and a Gestapo agent picks that he is not German. A bloody bar gunfight scene ensues where everyone is shot (naturally) and Hammersmark gets one in the leg. Landa arrives and is quickly onto their game.

As the premiere unfolds, Shosanna and Marcel prepare to set the cinema on fire. Landa interrogates Hammersmark. Losing his cool; he strangles her with his bare hands. He has Raine and Utivich arrested but strangely leaves the other two in place. Landa is a true nutter - he is not really devoted to any cause but himself. In a bizarre scene he negotiates with Raine's boss to gain immunity and rewards in exchange for allowing the war to end and his bosses to be killed. As he is sacrificing all around him for petty gain, Zoller goes to the projectionist booth to see Shosanna. This time her rejection is too much for him and she shoots him, but not before he can kill her as well in true Shakespearean style. Marcel bolts the doors to the cinema, trapping the Nazis. As the film reaches its climax it is interrupted by a new segment added by Shosanna. She informs them they are all about to be killed by a Jew. The cinema catches fire, the bombs go off and the two remaining Basterds blast the rest of the Nazis to hell with guns!

The film is truly stunning cult cinema, combining the feel of a Western, a war film and exploitation cinema. It is loaded with classic dialogue, wit, humour and a very dark sense of play. All of the characters are superbly played, from Christoph Waltz as the Nazi you most love to hate to Brad Pitt as the head Basterd. *Inglourious Basterds* became Tarantino's highest grossing film.

Many of his finest films (*Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown*, *True Romance*, *Kill Bill 1 and 2*) have now been re-released in a pulp magazine-style "Ultimate Collection" by Roadshow. (Australian R4 Release)

Each of the five DVDs has its own extras and through these we get a good insight into the actors and Tarantino himself. It's a good way to look at Tarantino's work to date.





**Primeval
BBC Warner
R2 DVD Set**

Reviewer:
Michelle Taylor

Primeval is a British science-fiction series in the vein of *Torchwood* and *Sanctuary*. Created by Tim Haines and Adrian Hodges, the two men behind the wildly successful *Walking with Dinosaurs* and *Beasts and Monsters* documentaries Primeval is the perfect way for them to further explore the creatures that have made them famous in a more plot driven show. There seems to be an emerging renaissance of British science-fiction television at the moment with various high quality series both resurrected and newly conceived being made that are really giving US productions a good run for their money, and in my mind *Primeval* is most definitely one of the best.

With beautifully rendered CGI long since extinct or not yet evolved creatures are brought to life that seamlessly fit into the contemporary British environment, creating an air of jaw dropping astonishment. Made for only three seasons the



show had a rather unique spin on the secret organization theme that I think was extremely entertaining; instead of dealing with aliens, supernatural entities or so called “abnormals” its overarching narrative deals with seemingly random anomalies that act as inexplicable doorways into the earth’s distant past, or distant future... and their associated denizens. Made by Impossible Pictures for ITV the series had a truly fascinating premise, and brilliant characterization. A carefully assembled team of specialised experts working out of a dedicated building called the ARC (Anomaly Research Centre) seek to monitor, contain and deal as



Initial Third series cast: Hannah Spearritt, Andrew-Lee Potts, Lucy Brown, Douglas Henshall, Ben Mansfield and Laila Rouass (not including Ben Miller, Jason Flemyng and Juliet Aubrey).



best they can with the effects of each and every anomaly as they happen and with any prehistoric or futuristic creature that invariably comes through. Under the auspices of the UK government the Primeval team work tirelessly to study the anomalies and the apparently unpredictable and complicated pattern in which they come and go, and when the need arises (as it frequently does) to put their lives on the line for the greater good of humanity.

For the first two seasons the team is led by the irascible but brilliant evolutionary biologist Nick Cutter (Douglas Henshall) his dependable aide Stephen Hart (James Murray) and two younger members in the shape of nerdy technical and logistical specialist, Connor Temple (Andrew-Lee Potts) and a feisty herpetologist and zookeeper, Abby Maitland (Hannah Spearritt) who over the course of the series form a close romantic bond. Abby and Connor end up living together in her apartment and over the course of the series they adopt three adorable prehistoric critters helplessly stranded in our time; a curious little Coelurosauravus they call Rex, and two Diictodon they name Sid and Nancy. The overall team is led by an officious, dry witted yet highly competent government official named James Lester (Ben Miller) and Claudia Brown/Jennifer Lewis (Lucy Brown) who in her first incarnation acts as the team's mousy government liaison officer, and then in her second incarnation as its haughty PR official who is put in charge of general damage control. After first Stephen Hart and then Nick Cutter die in the line of duty three more characters duly make their appearance; Captain Becker (James Mansfield) a Special Forces soldier assigned to help protect the team, Sarah Page (Laila Rouass) an Egyptologist recruited by Cutter to help research the possible manifestation of anomalies throughout human history and the new maverick team leader, ex-policeman and all round good guy Danny Quinn (Jason Flemyng) who falls easily into his role.

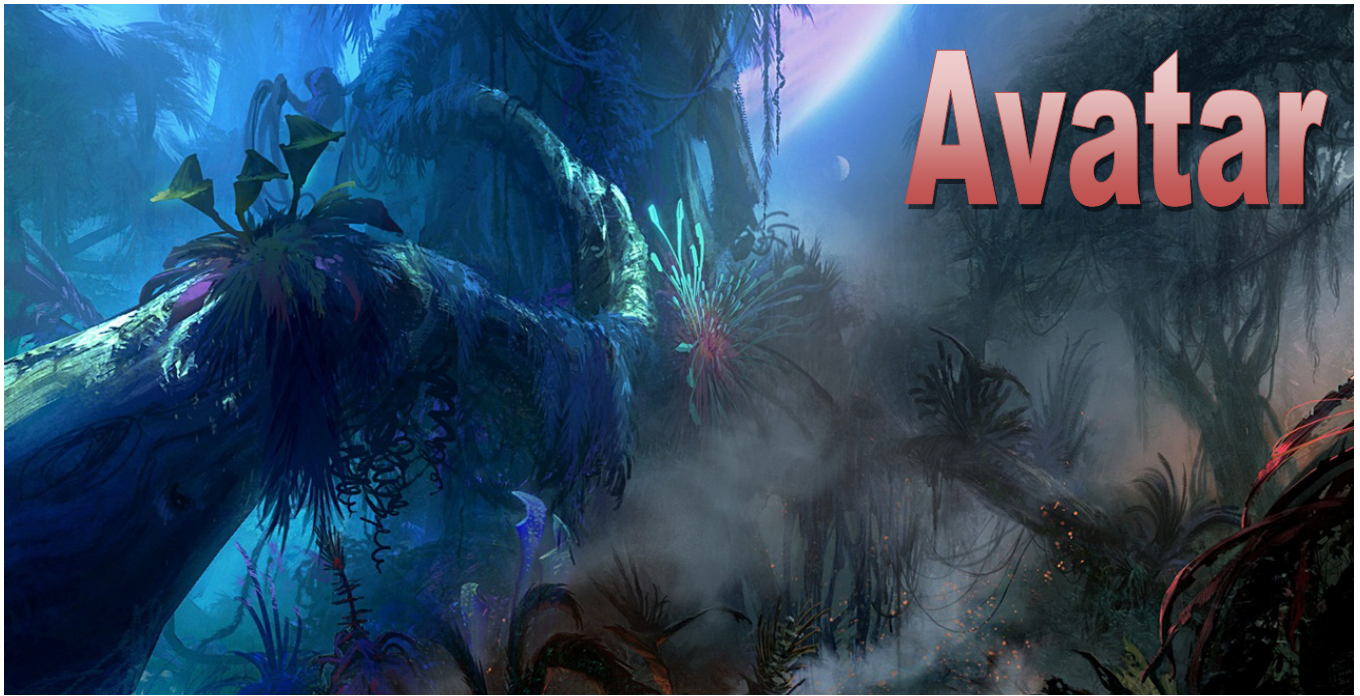
Unusually the series arch villain is a woman,

and long presumed to be deceased wife of Nick Cutter. Helen Cutter (Juliet Aubrey) is not your average Hollywood villainess in that she is an exceedingly intelligent, dangerous and resourceful palaeontologist dead set on wiping out the human race... which she's convinced is utterly beyond redemption. After an experience in a post-apocalyptic future Helen had mistakenly come to believe that Nick and his team were somehow responsible for the world's future calamity, and that they must be stopped at all costs, and by any means. So having used the anomalies to jump from epoch to epoch she has spent eight long years purposely travelling in time, and hence has acquired mysterious future technology and an unsurpassed knowledge of how to predict exactly where and when an anomaly will happen.

In this rip roaringly fun series our heroes face an onslaught of creatures from Silurian Scorpions, Scutosaurus, Giganotosaurus, Raptors and Mosasaurus to Smilodon, Colombian Mammoth, Terror Birds and even Dodos. Speculative futuristic creatures are also included from the aptly titled Gremlin, Mer and Megopteran to the truly frightening Future Predators. The characters are generally well rounded and likeable; and even the series bad-dies are engaging and affable enough, though of course eventually they get their just deserts. Apart from the ever present threat from the calculating Helen Cutter there is also a shadowy government organization led by a power hungry bureaucrat who is intent on learning how to control certain creatures as deadly weapons, especially the volatile Future Predators, and this organization seems to be the true culprit responsible for the devastation that Helen has seen in the distant future... and wrongly blamed on the Primeval team.

Due to financial difficulties ITV had announced that they were going to discontinue Primeval but because the series was deemed too immensely popular to let go Impossible Pictures have struck a deal with BBC Worldwide and Pro7 to coproduce two further seasons, to be shown on ITV sometime in 2011. There is also rumour of a feature film in the works, to be coproduced in conjunction with Warner Bros. If you haven't seen Primeval yet and are obsessed with dinosaurs and extinct megafauna, or just beasts and creepy crawlies in general I suggest that you give Primeval a try. I did, and rather pleasingly

I found it to be remarkably enjoyable!

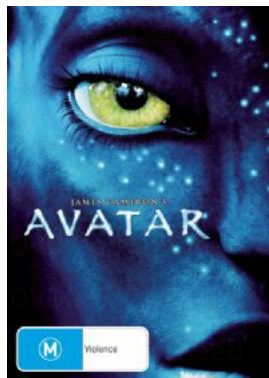


Avatar
20th Century Fox
Various Releases
DVD and Blu Ray

Sam Worthington plays Jake Sully; a disabled ex-marine who finds a new life on a distant planet known as Pandora. He has taken over a highly specialized job after the death of his brother and with little training must step into his shoes.

On Pandora, a problem has arisen with the indigenous population of the planet, the Na'vi. They are not pleased with the mining corporation's intrusion onto their land and begin to fight back. In an attempt at negotiation the Avatar Program is developed whereby a human operator can transplant his or her consciousness, on a temporal basis, into a genetically modified Na'vi body. This is significant since the Na'vi are very different from humans; ten feet in height, blue skinned and superior in strength. They live a semi primitive lifestyle with a animistic belief system.

While this scientific program led by Grace Augustine (Sigourney Weaver) is working at negotiation, the military is also making its presence felt. Col. Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang) leads their operation on Pandora and wants to use "shock and awe" to force the natives to submit. When Jake becomes separated from his team he is rescued by Neytiri and unwittingly finds himself at the centre of Na'vi society. As he is trained in their ways and traditions he must de-



cide which side he will fight for when the chips are down.

Avatar is a difficult film to review. From one perspective it is a true marvel of modern cinematography, using the latest CGI to create an amazing new world. The look of the film is truly unique since it was shot using a new form of camera known as the Fusion 3D which is able to truly mix CGI and real time action into a realistic high definition film. When you add in Peter Jackson's Weta Digital visual-effects you know this will be ground-breaking work of cinema. But this is part of the problem, while it might be the most expensive film ever made and certainly the most visually stunning; it has put style before substance, visual appeal over plot and character development.

Avatar is marked by an incredibly simplistic plot, one which has literally no depth whatsoever. While the characters of Jake Sully and Grace Augustine may be of some interest, the Na'vi are stereotypes of the most obvious form. But that is not the worst of it. Col. Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang) and Giovanni Ribisi (Parker Selfridge) who is the head of the corporation are comic book characters.





The human Jake and the engineered Na'vi avatar

At times Quaritch is so ridiculously over the top you want to laugh.

Avatar is also terribly paced, it is a three hour film and the vast majority seems taken up with Jake's new age adventure on Pandora. Then suddenly the war starts and the whole film moves from a mushy love-in to a violent action film. While *Avatar* received a PG rating in the US, it was rated M in Australia, not surprising in my mind considering the violence in some of the later scenes.

While it certainly has its emotionally powerful set-pieces, the intense destruction of the Na'vi "World Tree" comes to mind; these are few considering the length of the film.

The most obvious flaws in *Avatar* come from the simplistic reduction of significant themes into a "good vs. evil"- indigenous vs. corporation plot and the saturation of the film with new age mumbo jumbo. It is truly amazing how *Avatar* reduces a range of highly complex themes and motifs into a ludicrously simple "us vs. them" presentation. Let us look at some of these themes and motifs.

The Noble Savage

The Na'vi are presented as some sort of idealized indigenous people. They are what we might expect a native people to look like if filtered through the lens of a new age fantasy author. They are not only supposedly one with the land but part of it in some sort of unique way; the planet is actually alive and operates like a gigantic brain or organism and the Na'vi are able to literally tap into it using it to store and access "race memories". I think most indigenous people watching *Avatar* would laugh and ask *Is this really how you see us?*



Jake as a Na'vi

The religion and mystical practises are all horribly new age with an abundance of chants (taken from a myriad of cultures) and drumming. This whole presentation reduces the reality of indigenous cultures to an idealised myth.

Let's take a couple of examples. The American Indians had a fascinating and complex culture but at the same time it was also undoubtedly brutal using various forms of body scarification, mutilation and ritual scalping of the enemy in war time. The Mayans are another good example who made human sacrifice the centre of their religious traditions. While this does not take away from the beauty and majesty of their art and architecture, it does make it difficult to idealize a culture which thought tearing out a living heart was a significant religious rite.

Colonization

Cameron extends this same simplification to the issue of colonization. It is ever so simple to place the Na'vi on another planet so that issues of colonization can be addressed in a truly reductionist manner. The reality is that with the development of complex western civilization at some stage cultures had to clash.



Avatar was also a successful videogame

We are on one planet with limited space and it is naive to think that native cultures could continue to exist in blissful isolation while the rest of the world moves on into industrialization. By placing the Na'vi on Pandora, Cameron simplifies the whole issue of colonization to the level of stupidity and does not grapple with the problem at all.

Industrialization

Cameron portrays the military-corporate complex in a comic book manner; they represent the "Ugly American" who wants to make money at all costs and has no time for native rights or the environment. Certainly there are elements of this portrayal that ring true, especially in regards to right wing American politicians and their corporate buddies. However, once again, it has been simplified to a level that it does not really grapple with the theme in any significant manner.

The corporation has not just gone to Pandora to rape and pillage, they have brought with them a scientific team and have been trying to negotiate some sort of solution. The question that arises is what should a corporation do when faced with the superstition of a small group of people which is blocking access to a multi-billion dollar supply of precious metals or minerals? Certainly some level of respect is required but are we required to show respect to all sorts of bizarre and superstitious beliefs at the cost of development. Certainly the violent military overkill as shown in Avatar is emotionally powerful but it is manipulative.

The reality is that on planet earth we have to make do with the resources we have and there is no evidence for a world soul or other such rot so should such beliefs stand in the face of progress?

New Age Mysticism

This leads to the major flaw of the film; it is saturated with new age mumbo jumbo. From the "Native Savage" depiction of the Na'vi to the silly idea that Pandora is a living brain and that cutting down a single tree would hurt the "Goddess", the film is filled with truly superstitious notions. There is a constant use of new age type music, idealized depictions of Jake's quest for Na'vi initiation to the related demonization of western civilization.

In Avatar, of course, the evil corporation is thrown off the planet and must return home but on Spaceship Earth there is no escape pod so what does Cameron think we should do? Does Avatar really advocate returning to the trees and living in "tune with nature" as noble savages. This is hokum and dangerous hokum at that; it reduces debates about indigenous and environmental issues to feel good mysticism.

Environmentalism

Avatar's handling of environmentalism is no better than any of the other subjects. While it certainly offers an emotive and powerful depiction of the effects of using the military to access the land and resources of a native people it does not engage in any real exploration of the subject. Once again it is the evil corporation vs. the environment and the solution seems to be leave the planet as it is.

That may be fine for mythical Pandora but hardly a solution for planet earth. This simplistic reduction of the whole environment debate to a "return to the trees" level does not really do any justice to the complexity of the issue especially when we are living in a time when climate change is such a threat. I would really go as far as to say that Avatar is reckless in its simplistic portrayal of such issues and ultimately will hurt rather than help the environmental debate.

Avatar is a film about which I am very ambivalent, I have written a long review as it is a major release which is getting maximum publicity and it would be amiss for us not to discuss it.

It is a visually stunning film with amazing CGI, but while it is a feast for the eyes it will sadly leave the mind wanting. It may be the most expensive film ever made, but this won't be for long. It is not a film which will stand the test of time well as it is lacking both in plot and character development.



Technology changes at lightning speed and it is fascinating to consider how the world of cult film has changed. From the earliest days in grind-house cinemas, it hit the small screen in the form of home video with a vengeance, and then moved onto DVD and Blu Ray. At the same time something was brewing in the background. As with music, customers wanted portability. It is great to have special editions and high quality discs, but at the same time many viewers want to be able to easily access movies from their home rather than having to seek out titles from obscure video shops.

In terms of music it began with the lowly portable cassette then the CD Walkman. However the real revolution came with the mp3 format and players which could literally hold libraries on a single drive. With films the problem of compression versus quality was a bigger issue but slowly this changed with the advent of divx, mp4 and other formats. It became possible to make available a very high quality film at around 700 MB and with any reasonable speed internet connection this is very realistic. The idea of downloadable video is especially significant with indie, cult and low budget films.

In a market where high budget Hollywood films seem to have taken possession of the psyche of the masses. These films may have a limited ap-

peal but are still very important to those of us who love genre cinema. Making them available in a cost effective way with low overheads is a sound business model, especially considering that internet downloads avoid various issues such as duplication and distribution costs and can even circumvent overzealous censors.

Something Weird, of course, have not put all their eggs in one basket and have a wide and diverse range of special edition DVDs and DVD-R titles. At the same time by making a sizable library of these films available via download it creates another means for us to access the weird and wonderful world of cult and genre cinema.

So who the hell is Something Weird ? Around 1990 Something Weird Video began with the idea of releasing films that had never been on video. The focus was on the exploitation and sexploitation films from the Thirties through the Seventies and there are over 2,000 of them and the number is still going up ! Soon Something Weird was working with such people as Dave Friedman, Dan Sonney, Harry Novak, H.G. Lewis, Bob Cresse, and many other colourful characters to bring their work into the new growing market. It began with outrageous videos with awesome video art (I still have some of their early videos) and later moved into DVD

and, for other titles, DVD-R on demand via their website.

The Something Weird downloads are a new method to access their extensive library. The films are yours to keep and do not expire within a set period. They are full length, high quality digital movie files in the .m4v format with file extension of .mov. The movies are encoded at dimensions of 624 x 480 in their original aspect ratio, using the H264 codec. For the uninitiated this may sound like technical jargon, but let me tell you they are surprisingly clear in both picture and sound.

They can be played on most computer applications (Apple Quicktime, iTunes etc) as well as on most Media Players such as the Western Digital HD TV Live or the Astone Media Gear players. They also work well on portable players such as the Ipod or Zune.

If you prefer another format you can use any video converter. There are abundant commercial ones on the market such as those from AVS4YOU (<http://www.avs4you.com>). At the same time there is a free mp4 to AVI converter from Pazera available: http://download.cnet.com/Pazera-Free-MP4-to-AVI-Converter/3000-2194_4-10784027.html which you can use to change the mp4/movie file to the more often used Windows format avi.

We have been very impressed with the high quality of these films when played on up sampling media centers, the Astone Media Gear AP-110D Media Player (see review this issue) gave a crisp 1080p picture on these files which was surprising considering their size.

So, what can you get from Something Weird? Their library includes an amazing and diverse range of wild and wonderful cult cinema; exploitation, sexploitation, horror, B grade to Z grade, everything you can imagine and a lot more. Let's have a look at a selection of their titles; we have chosen a diverse range to give you a good idea of the marvellous weirdness on offer.

Ecco (Mondo di Notte 3) (1965) is a marvellous Mondo download from Something Weird. Edited together from two Italian Mondo films by Bob Cresse it was given the title *Ecco* which means



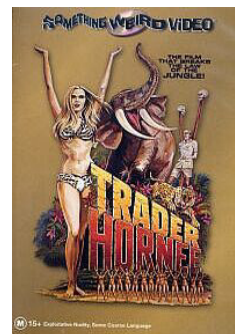
"look, witness, observe, behold!"; which I think refers to the superbly voyeuristic nature of its content.

Filled to the brim with bizarre and outré scenes, all narrated in a deadpan voice by George Sanders from a script which is cynical, sarcastic and, at times, downright nasty this is a superb guide to the weird, wonderful and strange.

The film opens with a secret "duelling club" in Berlin, where the object is not to kill, but to leave a scar on your opponent's face and the film gets more and more weird from there. Black Masses, Witchcraft, a condescending look at native customs, a transvestite dancer, Lapp women who castrate reindeer with their teeth, male strippers and lots more. There is Yvon Yva, the "apostle of the will" who draws long needles through his body to prove his spiritual strength, a performance by the Paris Grand Guignol theatre and a meeting of the buttocks appreciation society.

All presented to a thundering score by Riz Ortolani which ranges from choral and classical to pop numbers, which at times seem as over the top as the commentary. Released in 1965 at the beginning of the Mondo film craze this is a real gem and is in surprising good shape, encoded from the 35mm negative, and letterboxed for widescreen in approx. 2.35:1.

Trader Hornee (1970) directed by Jonathan Lucas and written by David F. Friedman, was considered a racy sex comedy at the time and was censored in many countries. Today it is rather quaint and fun, a bit like a "Carry On" film with lots of nudity and sex jokes.



Fifteen years ago, the Matthews family headed out into the wilds of Africa in search of the legendary white gorilla. Sadly they meet an untimely end being murdered by the Meshpoka, the most feared tribe on the continent. Rumours abound that their young daughter, Prentice may still be alive having been adopted by a native tribe. Moreover, they hear of a White Goddess in her early twenties named Algona, and wonder if they are one and the same.

Since she is the heir to a fortune, the Bank of Wabash asks Hamilton Hornee, a private eye



A scene from sex-romp *Trader Hornee*

and his assistance Jane Sommers to try and locate her. Hornee takes along Prentice's nefarious cousin Max Matthews and his nympho wife Doris who have a special interest in the case since they are up for the cash if Prentice cannot be found. Horne also takes along Tender Lee, a newspaper columnist and gay zoologist Stanley Livingston.

Final revelations include that the great white gorilla is actually the British commissioner who is an escaped Nazi war criminal in an ape suit and that Algona doesn't want to be freed and keeps Hornee for herself!

Trader Hornee while is great campy fun; dated, silly and filled with schlock humour, it is the sort of movie you don't want to admit enjoying but love nevertheless.

Satanis (1970)

"This is a very selfish religion. We believe in greed, we believe in selfishness, we believe in all the lustful thoughts that motivate man."

Anton LaVey was a highly significant figure in the 1960's. Founder of the Church of Satan he fought against conservative religious and political trends for individual rights and freedom of expression. Many people today do not realize the importance of his battle; while he had a shaved head and wore a dark cape, presenting a striking if not intimidating image, he stood for freedom of sexual expression (straight, gay and fetish) in a time when others would not dare. He did not ask for equality nicely, but demanded freedom from the straight jacket of Judeo-Christian moralism and did so with flair and panache.

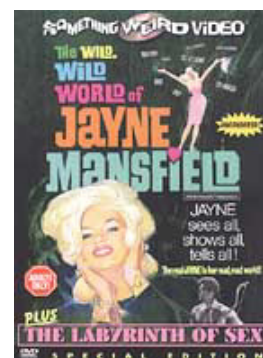


Anton LaVey—Satanis

LaVey was an enigma who founded a Satanic church while not believing in Satan. For LaVey Satan was a totem, a symbol, he represented the carnal side of mankind. In many ways the Satanism the Church expounded was a form of Atheism mixed with Social Darwinism and a dash of Sixties sexual excess. He produced the best seller *The Satanic Bible* which was followed by *Satanic Rituals* and *The Satanic Witch*. Later in his life he followed these with various volumes of social commentaries which offered a decidedly jaded view of humanity and the world in general.

While LaVey made other documentaries such as *Speak of The Devil*, *Satanis* was the most comprehensive including original footage of the Church in action and interviews with LaVey's family, neighbours, and Church members. It is a superbly flamboyant film with grand rites, impressive footage of LaVey (as well as his pet lion) and an outline of the philosophy behind the Church.

Labyrinth of Sex Nel labirinto del sesso (Psichidion) (1969) aka *Sexual Inadequacies* opens with the birth of a child and then explores in exploitation style the nature of sex. Directed by Alfonso Brescia, this is a pseudo psychological exploration of the nature of deviation and it is ever so much fun with all sorts of perversions re-enacted



for our viewing pleasure in loving detail. There is so much to learn here, being gay comes from parental neglect while being a dyke comes from constant screaming. Voyeurs are created by kids withdrawing from life after they see Mommy doing the wild thang with Daddy and Sadists are simply recreating dysfunctional home dynamics. The pop psychology on show is rather frightening and would be offensive if it was not so outrageously dated and hysterically funny. At the same time don't forget this is exploitation cinema and there are some nice surgical scenes including gender re-assignment and sex scenes to keep the shock level high !

With many of these titles there are special editions on DVD available from Something Weird. For example, *Labyrinth of Sex* comes with *The Wild World of Jayne Mansfield* on a special edition DVD if you prefer.

Forbidden Adventure (1935) is a superb example of early exploitation cinema. It came from a time when US film distributors majored in titles exposing the dangers of drug use, the need for sexual health and the exoticism of foreign lands. It was a time when a truly innovative director could mix together all sorts of stock footage, carefully staged set-pieces and a commentary to make a "wild world cinema" film. This sort of cinema could cover a multitude of sins and show things, under the guise of education, that you could not hope to show in any other way.



The film hangs on a fairly hard to believe meeting of the L.A Adventurers' Club who screen a film supposedly shot by two explorers who died in the war. The explorers had travelled to Cambodia in 1911 with the footage edited together into create an exploration of strange customs. We see the strange and wonderful city of Angkor Wat but that is not all, we learn about reincarnation, strange rites and fire ceremonies as well as every possible animal adventure from lizards to pythons, tiger fights to bats, cobras to randy apes !

This is even more fun as it becomes quite clear that the footage has been cut together from all sorts of different sources with stock footage taken from everywhere from Cambodia to Congo



Scene from Bob Clark's *She Man*

all linked together with a supposedly coherent tale about two explorers. It is a truly marvellous romp and lots of fun.

She Man (1967) was directed Bob Clark who went on to create the rather more successful *Porkys* (1982) and more to my taste *Black Christmas* (1974).

"The People You Are About To Meet May Shock You!"

It is a strange film which opens with a call for tolerance and claims to offer insight into a misunderstood minority. However, it really just offers an exploitation style crime tale with evil drag queens, early gay characters and lots of sleaze. The central motif seems to be blackmail and manipulation by a devilish drag queen mixed with a dash of homespun wisdom all presented in a detective tale which is presented in a marvellously exploitative package. I do rather like the fact that through manipulation and pressure a drag queen can force a well-respected member of the U.S. Army to dress-up in women's underwear and work as her in-house maid.

A Detective tale mixed with transvestism, lesbianism, gay characters and scandal, what more could you ask for ? Presented in black and white, it is surprisingly clear for such an early film.

These films are all available from the download section of Something Weird (<http://www.somethingweird.com>). They are presented with excellent picture quality and sound, easy to download and play and with a very reasonable "digital footprint". We highly recommend you have a good look through the Something Weird download library, if these don't pique your interest, then we feel sure you will find something that will. To be honest, if you can't find something to excite you in their catalogue, we doubt you have a pulse !

JIM WYNORSKI

"Beautiful women running from death"

If you had more than 75 films to your credit, mostly profitable, wouldn't you expect to be well known? Not if your chosen area is the B grade film. A protégé of the legendary Roger Corman, Wynorski began his film career by cutting Corman's films and getting them ready for re-release. He must have impressed Corman because he was told if he could come up with a good story about a killer in a shopping mall, he could direct it.

The result was *Chopping Mall* (1986) and Wynorski followed it up by directing between three and five films a year and writing or producing many more.

His films were generally competently made and came to feature many up-and-coming actresses like Heather Locklear, Jennifer Love Hewitt (at 12 years old) and porn star Traci Lords in her first non-porn role in *Not Of This Earth* (1988).

He always acknowledged Corman as one of the greatest influences in his success. He said he learned more in his first six months with Roger than he did in four years at film school.

"I started working with Roger back in the early eighties. He and his wife Julie, who's also a producer in her own right, gave me a bunch of good breaks and I was able to create some good, fun films."

As tastes changed, so Wynorski's films changed as well. He successfully made the transition from horror to sci-fi and fantasy as special effects became cheaper, and seven of his films premiered



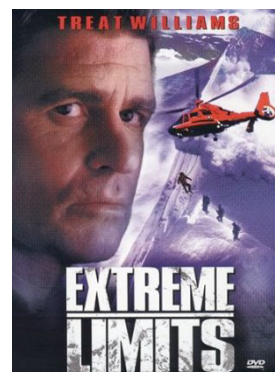
on the Science Fiction Channel.

An attempt at a kiddie film, *Home For Christmas* (1993) (aka Little Miss Millions) was received unenthusiastically.

Another, *Munchie Strikes Back* (1994), was a total flop. Wynorski should perhaps have stayed with what he knew best.

"Big Chase. Big Chests. Add those two to a movie and you've got a winner"

He even tried his hand at serious drama with films like *Extreme Limits* (aka *Crash Point Zero*, 2000). Such a film would be out of reach of a B grade budget but he rented the rights to footage from other films like *Cliffhanger* from Columbia Tristar that gave him the expensive stunts he needed.



He laughingly recalls that he used the footage so much that eventually a Columbia executive recognised the scenes and heads rolled. The film wasn't well received, however, as it contained many inconsistencies and some pretty



poor acting and dialogue. He also notes that the Science Fiction Channel thought they were buying too many of his films so he changed his production name to Jay Andrews and later Harold Blueberry to disguise his output.

He returned to the genre he loved.

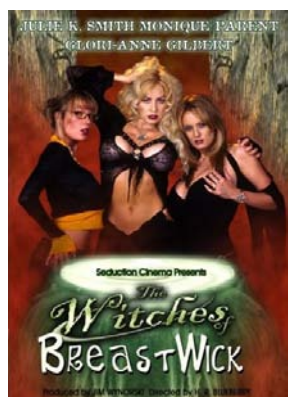
Cheerleader Massacre (2003), *Busty Cops* (2005), *The Witches of Breastwick* (also 2005) and *Cleavagefield* and *Para-Knockers Activity* (both 2009) will give you the idea.

Budgets were shrinking and production times were being forced down, however, and many of these later films have a really cut-price look to them.

A film that could take months to produce was now being cut to a few weeks and the quality of production was dropping noticeably.

This cost-cutting is seen in action in *Popatopolis* (2009) from Imaginart Entertainment. It is a documentary of Wynorski attempting to make a film in three days, something he was getting good at. The crew was cut to the minimum (no hair stylist or makeup artist, no onsite catering) and the equipment and crew were cut back to a camera, microphone, and two lights.

It is interesting to watch Wynorski, the actress-



es and crew try to work their way around these deficiencies. Most of the shots are set in a country house and the woods surrounding it. Instead of two or three scenes a day, Wynorski had to do a dozen or more. At least there wasn't much equipment to move from scene to scene.

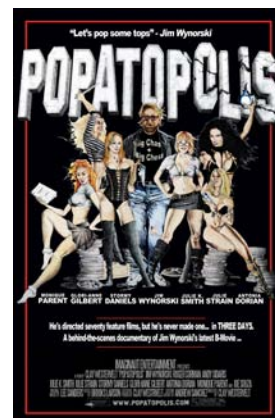
"I need something that lights breasts really well"

The pressure mounts. Wynorski, renowned for shouting at actors and actresses, becomes almost unbearable as he pushes scene after scene through the camera. A standard scene will consist of a brief walkthrough rehearsal then a live shoot. There simply isn't time for any more.

"Breasts are the cheapest special effect in our business".

The documentary contains many interviews with people like Roger Corman and the late Andy Sidaris, themselves kings of the low-budget film. Even Wynorski's mother makes an appearance. This lovely old lady doesn't seem to know just what sort of films her son makes, but she takes his advice and stays away from the ones he tells her she shouldn't see.

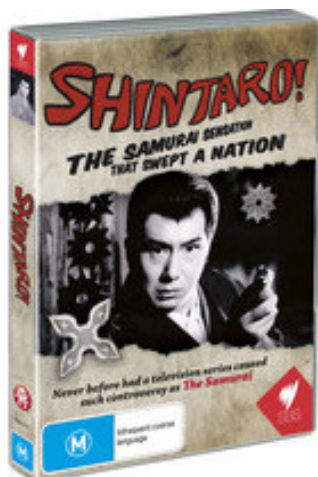
It would be easy to ridicule people like Wynorski for the quality and exploitation in their films. Countering this, however, is the problem of the big film companies that they simply can't fill the market with their blockbusters – they are too expensive. The B grade film gives actors and staff the experience they need to move on. The low budgets mean the production companies don't risk bankruptcy if they have a flop. Above all, many filmgoers like the less-than-glossy look of these cheapies. Experienced directors like Wynorski fill the "cheap and cheerful" gap well.





SHINTARO !

Shintaro!
Madman (2010)
R4 DVD



Just after Christmas 1964 Australia's Channel 9 Network bravely aired an imported kids' show set in feudal Japan. Called The Samurai, it dealt with the adventures of a young warrior named Akikusa Shintaro. It was lined up against some stiff competition like the Mickey Mouse Club and assorted cleaned-up-for-the-kiddies westerns. Much to the surprise of all concerned, it worked. It caught the imagination of Australian kids in spite of its obvious defects (including incredibly bad lip-synching) and started a Shintaro craze that was to last for a decade.

The period in Japanese history two to three hundred years ago was a time of consolidation. Powerful Shoguns were gradually uniting the country and the influence of the old feudal lords was being eroded. Samurai were a sort of high-level policemen who swore total allegiance to their master.

The first series was not shown on Australian TV, but it goes a long way to explaining the background to Shintaro's nomadic life. Instead the Nine network chose to start with the more action-oriented Series Two which featured every schoolboys' heroes, the Ninja. Once the series' popularity was realised people began to examine it more closely and a certain amount of resistance started to rise. Many Australian adults remembered the atrocities of World War II twenty years earlier and had a prejudice against anything Japanese.

Others were concerned about kids running around throwing shuriken (star knives) at each other – not all the knives were made of cardboard, and making a star knife that could stick



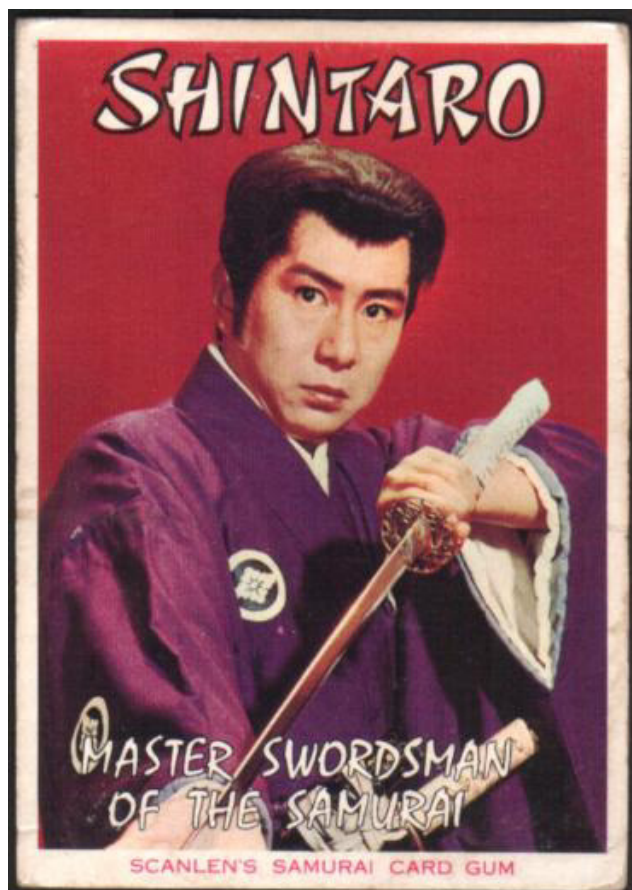
into a tree, just like in the show, was bound to bring playground prestige or an eye injury.

"Shintaro only had to stand beside a tree and suddenly it was alive with bloody star knives. They had no trouble at all hitting trees, they just couldn't hit people."

Although in the first series Shintaro carried a revolver, which made the series look a lot like a Western, he soon reverted to the two swords of the samurai. It was the posturing and ritualised fighting style that appealed to Australian kids, but it was the black pyjamas and shuriken throwing stars of the ninjas that really caught their imagination. The swordplay had the effect of setting the time period more effectively and since the show was now seen as historical it was less likely to offend the parents.

Shintaro had an ally in the Iga Ninjas, the "good ninjas" who helped him fight the various "bad ninjas" like the Koga Ninjas. Although the Iga Ninjas were the goodies, the Koga had all the best tricks. Other groups like the Spider Ninjas appeared throughout the ten series. Shintaro's friend in the Igas was Tombei The Mist who often accompanied him on his travels. He was also accompanied by a young orphan boy, Shusaku.

Once the success of the series was established the merchandisers moved in. Scanlens particularly sold bubblegum with Shintaro cards that are now highly collectible. It was perhaps inevitable that a stage show should be built around



the phenomenon. On Christmas day of 1965 actor Koichi Ose landed at Sydney Airport. He was persuaded by the show's promoters to don his Samurai costume before he got off the plane and was obviously puzzled by this. After all, *The Samurai* was just a kids' show. He was astonished to find nearly seven thousand screaming kids dressed as Samurai and Ninjas waiting for him. He is not a tall man and in the documentary he looks swamped and overwhelmed by the Australian policeman holding off the fans. The show ran for six days at the old Sydney Stadium. Demand was so high that it then ran for a short impromptu series in Melbourne as well. More Australians saw the Samurai stage show than saw the Beatles the following year. Koichi Ose never got a reception like this in Japan despite the show's popularity and he remembers Australia fondly.

Other TV channels replied with Japanese shows like *Starman* and *Phantom Agents* but they never had the same appeal. *The Samurai* finally retired in the late 70s.

The Samurai is an important point in Australian culture as it marked a turning away from the many mediocre American shows like *McHales Navy* and even the British offerings. With this

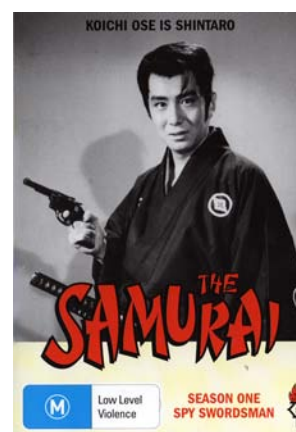


exposure to other cultures came a lessening in the anti-Japanese feeling of the parents and a greater readiness of the kids to try something different. Other Japanese shows gradually made their way into Australia, culminating in the classic anime film *Akira*. This cartoon show with its stylized drawing and serious themes opened the way for firms like Madman to import more films of a similar style, and they found a ready audience in the old Samurai fans as well as a new generation of viewers. Des Mangan's cult film show on Australia's SBS TV continued the trend to explore foreign films.

There has always been a certain hardcore group of fans who would like to revisit *The Samurai*. Madman has done us a huge favour by re-releasing the series. Shintaro may be gone but he is not forgotten.

The Samurai Series 1 Siren Visual (2010) R4 DVD

Japanese with
English overdubs



The northern island of Japan, Hokkaido, is inhabited by the Ainu people. It is controlled by the Matsumae clan. It is a time of starvation for much of Japan and the Shogun's idea is to resettle farmers to the largely uninhabited northern island. This will also head off Russian interest. The Matsumae are against interference since they are looting the island for their own profit. They are gradually taking over the island's gold mines. The Ainu do not regard themselves as Japanese and are building up to a revolution using new guns smuggled in from Russia. They have their own internal problems – bandits,



crooked merchants and corrupt local officials. The young samurai Shintaro is sent into this explosive mix to study the island, its resources and its people and report back to the Government in Edo. His main purpose is to find out how best to get control of the area from the Matsumae and whether the Ainu can be persuaded to support Japan against the Russians. To the Matsumae he is a spy, so their own samurai, Kiba Jinjuro, is sent to track down Shintaro and kill him. Jinjuro is an honourable, just man and gradually comes to respect Shintaro (the feeling is mutual) but he is loyal to his boss. At the end of the series there will be a showdown between these two.

Those who looked more closely at the show saw that it taught good moral principles like loyalty, protecting the weak, and respect for local customs. These values are brought out well in this first series as Shintaro comes to know the Ainu people and in many cases defends them against their Japanese overlords. It is interesting to note that Shintaro carries a six-shot revolver in these early episodes. In the later shows he reverts to the sword and the sword-fight action in the shows became legendary.



Practically nobody gets killed, but one episode finishes with an execution-style revenge shooting of a murderer that was rather out of character with the rest of the series. There is a lot of the Western in this first series, with the Ainu substituting for Indians and Shintaro representing a Lone Ranger figure.

The quality is not particularly great. It was a kid's show after all and budget constraints meant that much of it was shot outdoors. The actors were still settling into their parts and the acting was sometimes a bit wooden. The camera work, while showing the beginnings of the later fast-moving swooping combat shots, was still fairly basic. The music with its Hammond Organ background was simply dreadful.

Many of the costumes, however, are beautifully made and highlight the difference between the rich and the poor. The quality of the plots improved as the series went on and many plotlines were carried over a couple of episodes.

There are 128 episodes in this 3-DVD set. That's enough to bring back all the old memories or act as an introduction for first-time viewers. I was pleasantly surprised to find that after all these years I still enjoyed the show in spite of the poor quality of the original film – perhaps the next issues can be digitally cleaned up first?

Although the series are mostly out of stock, Siren Visual plans to once again release the rest of the shows, which went for ten series plus a two-series attempt to revive it in later years. At a time when kids' TV consisted of the Mouseketeers and interminable reruns of Bugs Bunny cartoons, *The Samurai* was a breath of fresh air.

Flesh for the Beast
Shriek Show
Media Blasters
R1 DVD



Flesh for the Beast is a film obviously made on a limited budget. It is clear from the onset that the acting is going to be average and that the director Terry West, known for *The Lord of the G-Strings: The Femaleship of the String*, is going to pack as much flesh into the film as he can. It is a strange film, while clearly a horror film, with a good measure of gore; it is also filled with nudity. West has a good eye for locations and the old mansion in which the film is based provides half the thrills with slamming doors, long corridors and dark basements.

The film opens in the Fischer House, an old mansion which a parapsychology team has come to investigate paranormal activity. It seems the home was the location where turn-of-the-century occultist Alfred Fischer undertook strange occult rites (as well as running a successful brothel) and vanished leaving the house unoccupied for many years. The new owner hires the team to supposedly "psychically clean" the house but actually is on a quest for a secret amulet by which he can control the occupants of the house.

It seems that Alfred Fischer sacrificed many of the girls who worked in his brothel in satanic rites and turned them into succubus; immortal demons who live on lust and flesh. They seduce men by tapping into their desires and then eat their flesh - literally ! As the new owner John Stoker quests for the amulet, he is in for a shock, Erin Cooper, one of the parapsychologists is not who she seems and may just spell his doom.

Flesh for the Beast has a lot going for it if you overlook its obviously limited budget. The wooden acting gets on your nerves for the first few minutes, but if you go with the flow, the mood of the film, the excellent ambience the old house provides and the unusual plot makes a fun experience. There is a nudity aplenty but little sex. It is obviously made for a certain "male" market where lots of naked female and gore are the currency of success.

The focus on succubus rather than zombies, vampires or traditional demons, makes this an

unusual film and does give it a bit of "cult" cred, the dark sense of humour and over-the-top gore also helps.

Savage Inmates
DVD-R
Cinema-de-bizarre

Savage Inmates (1978) *Die Insel der tausend Freuden* aka *Island of 1,000 Delights* is a strange exploitation film which has a very convoluted plot. It centres on the lives of the rich and not so rich on an island where sex, power and gambling are the name of the game.

The plot focuses on Michael, a gambling playboy, his many affairs, his wife Julia and her domineering and annoying mother, Lady Henriette. Howard is having an affair with his wife's best friend Sylvia. While Howard, who owns the local casino runs a slave trade operation and is involved in all manner of double-dealing. The plot twists and turns through an interesting crime tale using sex and nudity to sweeten the tale. Nudity certainly is in abundance with all sorts of unusual scenes include an erotic dance with a banana and the rather nasty use of a candle. The erotic content is high but the story itself is uneven and a bit confused. In the first torture scene the evil henchman supposed tortures Olivia Pascal, a private detective hired by Lady Henriette. He menaces her with a lit light globe but ends up pulling her pubic hairs ! Not much torture really. After she escapes she confronts Howard at a party but considering what has happened the confrontation is relatively mild.

It could be the editing as there are various editions of the film, but it could also simply be that this is a quirky exploitation film which was not especially edited, it is always hard to tell.

The story splits into various sub plots involving a missing girl, the supposed murder of Lady Henriette and the attempted killing of Michael, the way these are all brought together works well and the tale is ultimately quite satisfying. The acting throughout the film is fairly credible and the look of the film convincing. The score has more than its share of Seventies disco which is truly frightening but that was the period, wasn't it?

The mixture of eroticism and crime thriller certainly makes this an unusual exploitation film with enough sex, nudity and sleazy action to make it a joy to watch.

Ticked Off Trannies with Knives La Luna Entertainment

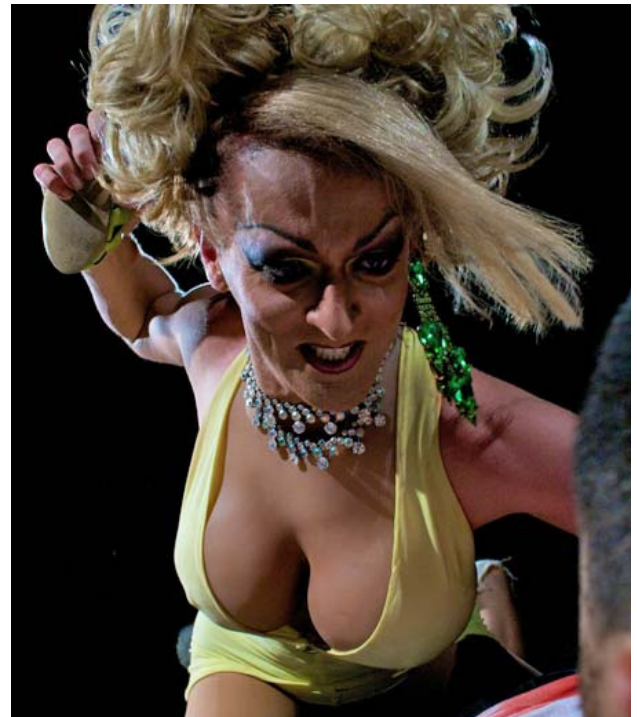
Sadly in 2010 the lives of many Gay, Lesbian and Transgender people are still marred by experiences of violence. Each year as we strive forward with extra rights and more general acceptance reports of violence seem also to be on the increase. The transgender community is especially hard-hit with regular reports of gruesome killings in the news. The question as to how to depict such experiences is a difficult one.

While there have been many serious films with strong emotional impact, Israel Luna has taken a more controversial approach but one which, I believe, ultimately works especially well. Using the formula of the 70's exploitation film with special reference to the rape-revenge genre Luna has created a new genre which puts trannies in the driving set.

The film stars a group of sexy and outrageous transwomen who not only look great but are born actresses including Rachel Slurr, Bubbles Cliquot, Tipper Sommore, Emma Grashun and the truly scrumptious Pinky La 'Trimm.

The film is presented as a series of "acts" a bit like the old movies shown in grindhouse cinemas with all sorts of breaks, scratches and cut-tos.

The first act is where we get to know the girls. It captures the spirit of a modern gay club with its outré drag acts and is filled with sharp dialogue and lots of laughs. The line between showgirl,



drag and stripper is blurred in these marvellous performances.

The second act made me very uncomfortable; it was a very realistic depiction of a hate crime and involves the death of two of the girls and the trauma of survival of the three others. This section was quick a shock after the humour of the first act and really brought home the violence that so many have suffered and continue to do.

The third act is the ultimate LGBT fantasy. It is a purely tasteless, over-the-top revenge sequence which is not for the politically correct amongst us. After regaining their strength these girls will not live in fear any longer and decide to take the law into their own hands in a superbly gore ridden finale. It is really quite an astounding set-piece filled with quite amazing images.

As I write this I can hear the more conservative members of our community titter and whine that this isn't the way to gain acceptance or other such nonsense. Well sometimes catharsis is good for the soul and for all of queers and transpeople who have been pushed around just once too often this is an empowering experience. The sheer audacity of the third act after the intensity of the second makes it quite a truly unique work of cinema and one I most heartily recommend.

Web: <http://www.lalunaentertainment.com>



Trannies get revenge

Violence in a Women's Prison
Another World Entertainment
R2 DVD

Violence in a Women's Prison (1982) *Violenza in un carcere femminile* aka *Caged Women* is a Women in Prison exploitation film by the Italian B grade film maker Bruno Mattei.



It stars Laura Gemser as Emanuelle who goes undercover to expose the vicious brutality of the prison system. She finds herself in one of the most dangerous women's institutions ruled by vicious and brutal guards and a truly psychopathic prison warden. Her only friend is the prison doctor who has been sentenced for Euthanasia and has been seconded from the male prison.

As her identity is revealed, she is beaten and tortured, but after initiating a riot she is able to escape and the prison authorities finally get their just deserts.

Mattei has created a moody and atmospheric title which includes its share sleaze and brutality. The AWE print is of excellent quality except for a few "blips" in the audio. It has a synthesizer score from Luigi Ceccarelli which while dated and a bit over the top certainly drives the film along.

The adjoining male prison is filled with violence, brutality, riots and sodomy, while the female prison is marked by lesbianism, abuse, drugs and corruption. Mattei shows an excellent use of cinematography and there are some impressive set pieces, though the acting leaves a bit to be desired.

A scene which comes to mind is about 30 minutes into the film is a good example, two prisoners are taken to the warden's cell where they are encouraged to pleasure each other. As their moans echo through the prison, guards watch with voyeuristic pleasure and the camera moves to other cells as prisoners masturbate or pleasure each other. The warden pleasures herself with a baton and then in an explosive of fury beats the women in a fit of anger.



The Evil Warden Vs. Emanuelle

There are many scenes which work well including the impressive girl fight between the prison guards and Emanuelle when she refuses to empty a bucket of shit and when pressed throws it all over them. The guards and Emanuelle wrestle in the mess beating the hell out of each other. Emanuelle is then placed in isolation where rats are poured into the cell biting her all over.

Other set pieces including girl fights, a rape scene set up by the prison warden for her voyeuristic entertainment and the use of a bell to torture Emanuelle and force her to admit she works for the press.

Mattei does try to cover some serious issues such as prison abuse, Euthanasia and even reflects on homosexual rights, though the gay character is fairly stereotypical.

This is an unusual women in prison film in that while it has the requisite lesbian action, girl fights and evil wardens, it is not as heavy handed as most in the genre. Indeed with its questionable acting and bizarre scenes at times it is more humorous than anything else. It is certainly lots of fun and the release from AWE is fully uncut.

Another World Entertainment
Web: <http://www.anotherworldent.com>

Bill's Dirty Shorts
2006
Adult Animation
Microcinema
R1 DVD

Bill Plympton is a seriously deranged man. He is also a very skilful cartoonist with a good eye for a ridiculous situation. His cartoons, even the very short ones, are full of sex, mayhem, and death. Nothing is sacred, not even Jesus or Elvis. From Life Of A Tree to the Death Of Jackson Pollock we are presented with a series of his really strange takes on life. Some are just brief animations, nine of them are short films.

Perhaps a list of the subsections will give you an idea of where his mind wanders.

Sex and Violence – this covers everything from people who share a flat to sex with an octopus.

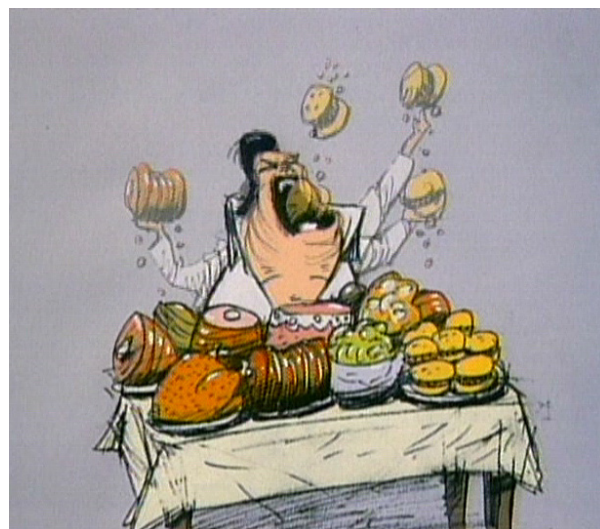
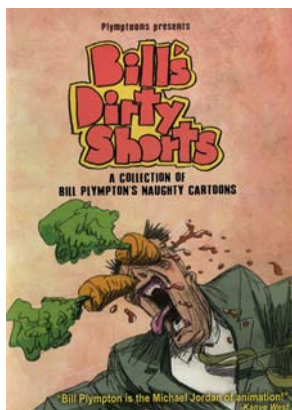
The Exciting Life of a Tree- about a tree that doesn't want to become a Christmas tree, and so must defend itself.

More Sex and Violence – naturally

Can't Drag Race With Jesus

Eat – many food-related shorts ranging from quite disgusting to completely gross

Parking – a short film about a war between a parking lot administrator and a blade of grass that doesn't want to give in to the bitumen.



Elvis

Krazy Kock – probably the less said the better, but this is not one for the kiddies. Lets just say that chicken mascots and horse aphrodisiacs don't mix.

And 30 short flash animation like Rudolfo the Gay Lion Tamer.

We also get as a bonus a series of animations Plympton did for television advertising. These, fortunately for the advertisers, are simply funny.

That is Plympton's success secret – he can turn any situation into a funny one, like How To Grab A Woman's Breast. He has no respect at all for conventional social attitudes, preferring to go that one step past reality and into fantasy, gross though it may be. I haven't seen such skill since the Monty Python days.

Web: <http://www.plymptoons.com>



Airbags



Surprise

Cure
Madman 2010
R4 DVD

*Japanese with
English subtitles*

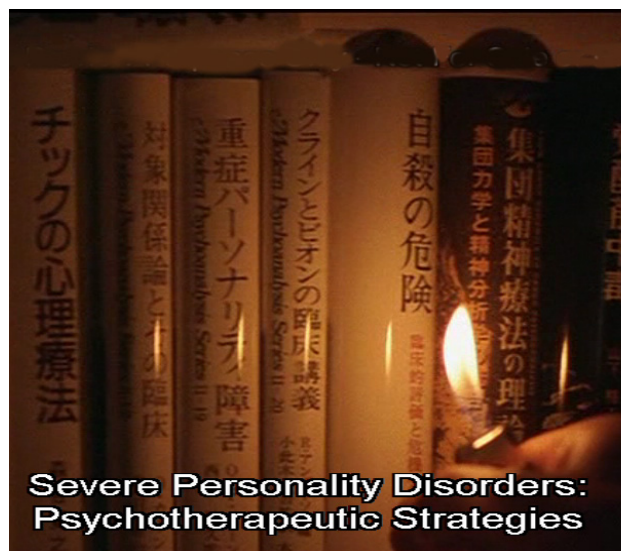
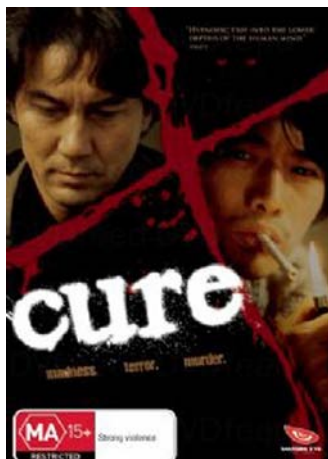
Director Kyoshi Kurosawa has given us a truly dark film that is more psychology than action.

It has been around since 1998 but apart from a small release in the United States it has not been released in English until now.

The plot is fairly simple. People are being murdered but none of the murderers remembers anything about it. A wife is killed by her husband, a policeman kills another officer at his station. The final killing blow in each case is when a cross is cut through the victims' throats, severing their carotid arteries. It is obvious to Detective Takabe that there is some sort of serial killer at work, but who or what is the connection between the murders?

Suspicion falls on a young man, Mamiya. He has briefly known each of the victims or killers and seems to be the only connection, but he too claims that he has lost his memory of each contact. In fact he forgets bits of conversations that have just happened. Takabe starts to have strange hallucinations about murdering his young wife who suffers from a mental illness and takes up all his spare time. Is the case getting to him?

Mamiya is put in a mental institution while Takabe tries to track down his past. He eventually finds where Mamiya has been living and what he finds goes a long way to explaining the mur-



**Severe Personality Disorders:
Psychotherapeutic Strategies**

ders and his own hallucinations - perhaps. Has Mamiya been playing games in Takabe's head?

If so how can Takabe put an end to it to protect his wife?

Is Mamiya himself the victim of somebody's head games or is he the most evil person alive?

Kurosawa hands out clues grudgingly, requiring the viewer to think carefully about the plot as it develops. It is not a logical sequence of events but a suggestion here, a clue there, and it must all come together in your own mind before the direction becomes clear.

Even then there is little hint of the final action that will be necessary, and I confess I didn't see it coming.

If you like your films to make you think and you can handle the very dark content of this film, give it a try.



You took your scalpel
and cut into him.



last night you killed your wife Tomoko.

Curious Stories, Crooked Symbols Rue Morgue Cinema R1 DVD

Rod Gudino has a very vivid imagination. It comes through in the three short stories featured on this collection. If you like your films neatly packaged with a linear development between start and ending, these stories are not for you. If you like to use your imagination to flesh out a story, or even to develop the story in your own mind from the clues provided, you will enjoy this DVD.



Through *The Eyes of Edward James* we see a grisly murder develop. Edward is undergoing hypnosis as part of his psychotherapy to find the meaning of the terrible dream that keeps haunting his sleep. The dream ends with a mysterious watcher outside the house, and his wife's slashed and bloody corpse lying on the floor. What hidden secret is in his past? The stop/start narrative as the hypnotherapist helps Edward relive his dream gives us time to get the full impact of the terror he is undergoing. We see it happening through his eyes and we are just as mystified about what it means.

The Demonology of Desire is a story of a psychopathic schoolgirl who has a wish for a slave to do her every bidding. The tale contains elements of growing sexuality, rebellion and an unhappy school life. Her wish is granted and a thirteen year old boy with a crush on her becomes her slave. What she does with him is quite unnatural except to the most twisted mind.

Perhaps the most unusual is *The Facts In The Case Of Mister Hollow*. It is a very short section, consisting of a photo and a warning to look at the detail. The photo appears to be of a group



Mr.Hollow

of people who are having a picnic in the woods. A proud father and his wife and baby are posing for the camera while another man prepares a campfire. On the surface. As the camera picks out the detail the picture becomes more sinister. In the background is what appears to be a derelict house, silhouetted eerily against the skyline. The man making the campfire has a distinctly evil look, but why? The campfire itself is made from wooden stales, sharpened to a point at one end. We get only a hint from a montage of old newspaper reports shown at the start of the film.

And so it goes, with each detail forcing the viewer to revise the story in their own mind. We never find out if our mental picture is right or wrong and at the end of the film we are left with a feeling of suspense and more than a little horror at what the film has hinted at. I have never seen this technique before but letting the viewer construct their own story from the clues provided is a very powerful tool.

The film has the usual "making of ..." but has many other extras including the original screenplays and storyboards and a commentary by Rodrigo Gudino that is, in many ways, just as interesting as his films. This DVD is definitely for the thinkers among the horror fans.



Demonology



Demonology



The price of Rejection

Eulogy for a Vampire

Willing Suspension Films

Web: <http://www.eulogyforavampire.com/>

The film opens in an unspecified period when young monks of the mysterious Order of Pathicus are working together on tasks in a monastery. Things become complicated when Anthony's rather carnal lust for the guilt ridden Florian is spurned and in a fit of thwarted desire brutally kills him. Rather than report the brutal slaughter, the order hides his body in the basement. It is now 25 years later and Father Anthony, now the head priest of the monastery, has maintained the secret of the murder, and the hiding



A very strange Order indeed



The focus of everyone's desire

place of Florian's corpse.

He has a new crop of junior monks the vast majority of which seem to want to hump each other! But all is not well: animal eviscerations, strange sounds in the night, and the presence of a strange "phantom goat" in the dark corridors forebode an evil presence. Add to this, the handsome young drifter, Sebastian who is found unconscious near the monastery.

Eulogy for a Vampire is an intriguing exploration of the vampire myth through the lens of monastic sexuality. It offers an intelligent exploration of the dangers of sexual suppression and the power of male bonding. Certainly it was made on a limited budget, but this is transcended by the creation of a constant atmosphere of eroticism mixed with dread, which is delivered with a strong lashing of humour.

The film is marked with a campy mood which takes so many horror as well as gay stereotypes and uses them to its advantage; the way religious sexual suppression and gay sex is explored is quite marvellous as are some of the over the top images such as the ghostly goat. Eulogy for a Vampire is a highly enjoyable romp.

Evil Bong Full Moon Home Video (2006) Beyond Home Entertainment R4 DVD

This happy little romp is reminiscent of the good old days of the drug culture, with all the stereotype characters from the drug-soaked about-to-be-





Beware the bong

a-dropout student to the earnest young hero who just wants a quiet place to study metaphysics. Unfortunately he shares a flat with the pre-dropout, the sex maniac and assorted girls.

One of the boys buys a “magic bong” on eBay (note for those who never got into the drug culture and so still have a brain cell or two – a bong is a device for smoking illicit recreational pharmaceuticals. It should also be noted that they are not allowed to be sold on eBay, specifically listed as prohibited sales items).

The bong is possessed by a female demon who takes control of the smoker and sucks their soul into the bong, leaving just their dead body behind.

Our hero soon realizes there is something sinister about the bong (the number of bodies lying around the flat is a bit of a giveaway) and when his girlfriend takes a puff and is sucked up by the bong he must rescue her the only way possible – take of puff himself, let the bong capture him and then try to save his girlfriend.



Love those special effects



Will his purity and innocence be enough?

Of course it won't, but he has help in the form of Tommy Chong, legend of the drug culture movies of the 70s. Tommy plays an old man named Jimbo Leary who once owned the bong. Jimbo decides he must end the evil bong's powers once and for all, even at the cost of his own life.

He beat the bong once before – can he do it again? Armed only with vitamin pills, he also enters the bong. Tommy Chong on vitamins??!! How have the mighty fallen.

The film has that slightly befuddled look that went with a lot of Cheech and Chong movies, as well as a good quota of stoners, semi naked girls, and characters from other movies. Don't expect great cinema.

The film was reputedly shot in only seven days. Either the actors are great at their parts or there was a lot of mind-altering chemical substance around. It's moderately funny, and if you enjoyed the Cheech and Chong films you will enjoy this one as well.



Party time

The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus
Sony
R4 DVD

The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus is an adult fantasy film written by Terry Gilliam and directed by Gilliam and Charles McKeown. The film is a superb example of Gilliam's enigmatic style which combines amazing CGI, bizarre fantasy and excellent character development. While the death of Heath Ledger certainly was a sad event for the all those connected to the film, using various actors to play the various "facets" of Ledger's character ultimately worked to the benefit of the film.

Tony is played by Ledger, Johnny Depp, Jude Law and Colin Farrell. Each character reveals a new layer of his character, a bit like peeling back the skin of an onion. It is a surprisingly effective device especially since each transformation is accompanied by a further entry through the mirror of Doctor Parnassus into the depths of Tony's psyche.

Parnassus illustrates Gilliam's scepticism about religious and supernatural figures. While Parnassus has some sort of power and is able to transport people through a mirror to explore the inner realms of their psyche, he is controlled by ego. He has spent his long lifetime gambling for souls with the devil, played by the irascible Tom Waits and has now reached the end of his journey as he have to hand his daughter's soul over to him when she reaches puberty if he cannot win this last bet.

Both Parnassus and Tony, who is escaping



Heath Ledger (Tony) & The Mirror



Depp, Farrell and Law: the other three Tonys

criminals he duped while using his charity as a front for fraud, are classic examples of the hypocrisy of the righteous and superbly well developed as characters.

The film combines a sardonic and witty take on modern life matched with the imagery of a side-show or travelling fortune teller. This circus like element gives the movie an unusual feel which is both playful yet menacing, it is humorous yet with a darkness in the shadows.

The CGI in the film is breathtaking, it has some 647 computer generated imagery effects shots and the worlds Gilliam creates are quite amazing. At the same time he does not allow them to override the plot or characters and each reflects the slow revealing of Tony and of Doctor Parnassus himself.

The combination of a fascinating plot, unusual characters and quite amazing fantasy sequences make this a must see film.



Parnassus and The Devil (Tom Waits)

Lurking Fear
Full Moon
Entertainment
Beyond Home
Entertainment
R4 DVD



This film has a history that goes back to its initial release on VHS in 1994 and you could expect it to look a little dated by now. It doesn't. Due to the good storyline (and, I suspect, to the minimal use of special effects) it is still a well-made horror movie. It is supposedly based on a 1923 story by legendary horror writer H P Lovecraft although opinions vary on how loosely the story has been translated.

The little town of Leffert's Corners is almost deserted now. The town is beset by ghouls that live in a tunnel complex beneath the cemetery and the town. Any unsuspecting new arrival is likely to become their prey, but now a group of people has converged on the town and a confrontation is going to leave many of them dead. There is the local girl with the crates of explosives. She intends to reclaim the town by blowing up the tunnel complex and to this end she has wired up the cemetery with tripwires and booby traps. She is being helped, reluctantly, by the local alcoholic doctor. A young ex-criminal, John Martense, just out of prison, has come to the town to recover money buried in the cemetery by his late father. The money is hidden in a corpse buried years ago. Members of his father's criminal gang are also in town. They, naturally, are after the money as well. A young pregnant girl is taking refuge in the church because she feels the ghouls will take her baby. They have already killed her sister.

The town's original ghoul is an ancestor of John Martense. He is on rather delicate terms with the local priest. They seem to tolerate each other, although the priest's constant whining prayers to the Lord to take him instead of the townspeople left me wishing the Martense ghoul would do just that.

The group is trapped in the church when the ghouls attack. Although they have some chance of defending themselves while they stay in the building, the leader of the criminal gang still wants the money and forces John Martense out into the cemetery to dig up the body and recover "his" money. The balance of power changes in the besieged church as one by one the group



Priest with guest

is picked off by the ghouls. It will take a certain amount of heroism or suicidal stupidity to eliminate them now and with the survivors bickering with each other this seems unlikely to happen.

The story is well constructed and as mentioned doesn't rely too much on special effects. The ghouls' makeup is brilliant. The film is mercifully free of most of the clichés like the "zombies chase the heroes through the graveyard". Those clichés that exist may well have been the scenes that other filmmakers copied later.

The feeling of horror is built up carefully as the group simply cannot unite to fight the common menace. Their deaths are largely a result of this failure to cooperate and there were times when I wished I could bang their heads together to knock some sense into them. There are no sympathetic characters in the film. Most are just out to get what they can of the money. It is this that gives the ghouls their edge at first.

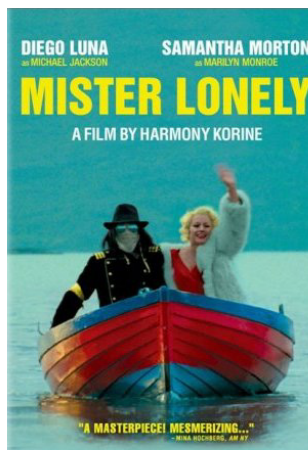
The quality of the transfer to DVD is a little soft, but otherwise OK. Considering its age, this is a great film of its genre and it is still a good watch.



Love those ghouls

Mister Lonely
ICA Films
R2 DVD

With a cast including Michael Jackson, Marilyn Monroe, Charlie Chaplin, The Pope, The Queen and Madonna, albeit all of them look-alikes, this is a very ambitious film.

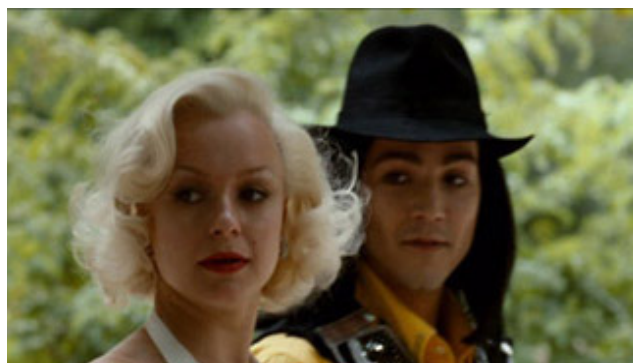


It is a strange and wonderful adult fantasy filled with unique characters, a powerful sense of alienation and outsidership and a strong sense of compassion. It is a daring film which matches art-house sensibilities with surrealism and an amazing visual sense.

Living as a Michael Jackson impersonator in France, Michael is growing weary of his lot in life. While entertaining at a nursing home, Michael meets Marilyn, a compassionate yet quirky Marilyn Monroe impersonator who encourages him to return home with her to a Scottish castle which is populated solely by fellow impersonators.

When Michael arrives, he is welcomed with open arms and the community seems excited by his presence. But soon interpersonal conflicts erupts including Marilyn having to deal with a very hard time from her husband, Charlie Chaplin, all the while developing a relationship with Michael.

The characters alone make this an astoundingly strange film. It has an element of fantasy yet expressed within a realistic presentation of the



world. Who has heard of a community living in isolation based on their desire to live fulltime as imperators? It is so ridiculous and yet works. The sub plot about flying nuns is equally eccentric and fascinating.

At the same time it explores the psychology of desiring to be someone else. There are all sorts of imperators including a very potty mouthed Abraham Lincoln, a smelly Pope who is constantly drunk, James Dean, and the Queen (played by Anita Pallenberg). There is also the Three Stooges, Madonna and Sammy Davis Jnr.

The film is hard to pigeonhole when it comes to emotional tone, it is funny, depressing, insightful and at other times downright bizarre. It is precisely this exploration of unusual emotional territories which makes the directors, Harmony Korines, work so fascinating. His work forces us to suspend disbelief and explore the world he offers us with an open heart and mind,

The film includes some significant actors including James Fox, Samantha Morton, Diego Luna and Werner Herzog. Herzog is especially intriguing as he is central to a subplot that follows Father Umbrillo (Herzog himself). When a nun falls out of a plane without a parachute and survives she encourages other nuns to test their faith likewise (God will be your parachute, she tells them) and Herzog, in his own enigmatic way, supervises the enterprise! The footage of nuns jumping out of a plane without parachutes certainly grabs your attention.

The cinematography by Marcel Zyskind is evocative and when coupled with the beautiful score and insightful character driven plot will leave you contemplating the nature of the human condition for quite some time.



Impersonators as a glyph for the masks we all wear in life...

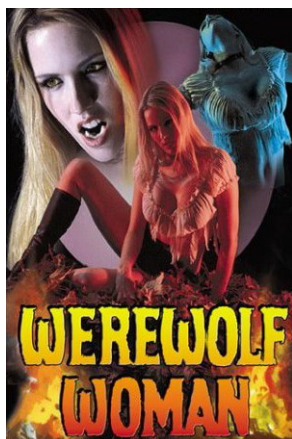
**Werewolf Woman
(1976)
Shriek Show
Media Blasters
R1 DVD**

Rino Di Silvestro was an Italian director who specialized in extreme low-budget exploitation cinema. He made his directorial debut with the highly successful women-in-prison title *Women in Cell Block 7* and continued in the same vein with the notorious *Deported Women of the SS Special Section*. Along the way his output varied including the schlock horror *Werewolf Woman* and the astoundingly outré drug exploitation classic *Hanna D: The Girl from Vondel Park* which was reviewed in an earlier edition of Synergy after a new release from Severin Films.

Werewolf Woman is a schlock horror with elements of exploitation thrown in for good measure. The psychosexual aspects of the film are pure trash with some truly bizarre moments from the lead and her psychiatrist. Scenes range from blatant rip-offs from *The Exorcist* to sexploitation. The dialogue from her doctor is pure psychobabble with marvellously meaninglessly discussions about neurotic energy complexes and parapsychology

The film opens long in the past, as these films tend to do. A naked woman is attempting to do a sexy dance in a fire circle in the forest, as she gyrates she transforms into the worst looking werewolf you have ever seen with a very strange nose!

She is hunted down by a pack of local do-



Very strange looking werewolf indeed

gooders, one of whom she quickly despatches but it is not enough to save her and she is captured and burnt at a stake.

Years into the future and Daniella Neseri is getting over a brutal rape. She is traumatized and her father has moved them to an old family estate in the country. Wrong move Dad! It is here that their ancestor was burnt for being a werewolf. After Daniella reads the tale and finds an image of the ancestor who looks remarkably like her she begins to think she is a werewolf. Whether she is or not is a matter of contention. Her psychiatrist thinks it is some sort of psychosexual perversion but this doesn't stop her biting men's throats out and going on a violent rampage. After having a murderous wild time, she meets a sensitive stuntman and begins a more stable relationship but this is again interrupted by evil rapists. But this time she is prepared and her werewolf self re-emerges!

This is a quirky film which is not really sure what it is. It combines a schlock werewolf horror film with a rape revenge theme and some fairly tasteless madhouse exploitation. The scenes where a lesbian nympho takes advantage of poor Daniella only to be brutally killed with a pair of scissors after setting her free are exploitation gold!

The werewolf special effects are woeful, she looks like she is simply wearing a suit covered with dark coloured hair and has an animal nose stuck on. Her werewolf noises are not much more convincing either !

The Media Blasters edition is rather amusing since the images on the front cover have nothing to do with the images on the back or the film ! However, it should be said Media Blasters have done good job getting hold of the uncut edition of 100 minutes and released it as a restored edition.



What's with the lizard ?

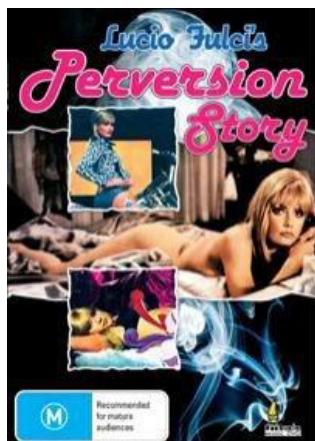
**Perversion Story
Umbrella
Entertainment
R4 DVD**

Perversion Story aka *One on Top of the Other* is an unusual Giallo from Lucio Fulci. Focusing on sex and eroticism rather than slaughter and mayhem, it is nevertheless a superbly nuanced detective tale. Considering the films Fulci would go on to make, such as *The Beyond* this is a rare title with minimum gore and maximum story.

Dr George Dumurrier, is a physician with an eye for the ladies and a taste for the high life. Played by Jean Sorel, he is attractive, suave and manipulative. He runs the Dumurrier Institute, a trendy medical establishment in San Francisco. But there is a problem; his business is hemorrhaging cash on a daily basis. While George is out having a good time he leaves his hardworking brother Henry to try and keep the business afloat. We come to intimately appreciate the extent of George's sex life through a range of artistic and very Sixties sex scenes. His primary affair is with a young model named Jane.

Susan, his wife, is extremely ill with asthma and it not especially likable. She is certainly aggrieved, but her bitterness and venomous nature make her a character you would not immediately identify with.

One night when George is away with Jane he



George has a taste for the high life

finally decides to answer messages which have been left for him by his brother, Susan is dead.

A few weeks after her death it transpires that she took out a two million dollar insurance policy on her life of which he is the sole beneficiary; certainly strange considering the strained nature of their relationship. The money saves the medical clinic and gives George some cash to spend but things soon start going a little awry.

First he receives a phone call telling him to go to a local strip bar. This is not some sleazy backstreet establishment, but an upmarket affair with a beautiful model doing an outrageous act on a motorcycle. Soon she realizes that the dancer, Monica Weston, looks exactly like his wife, except for her eye colour and blond hair. He becomes more concerned when he finds the nurse who was looking after his wife the night she died cannot be found and a few days later sees her photo as a model at Jane's modelling agency. As the tale unfolds it ends up very satisfying with lots of unexpected twists and turns and a dark finale edition.

This is an unusual Fulci tale in that it does not "let the blood" do the talking, but has an excellent plot and is filled to the brim with beautiful women, sex scenes and a detective tale all set to an amazing jazz score by Riz Ortolani. The cinematography is excellent and of course being set in San Francisco, everything from the scenery to the bars and cars looks just perfect.

The DVD from Umbrella is as clear as a bell and is a delight. The pictures and colours are solid; the score is marvellous and the dialogue clear. I do prefer the Italian with English subtitles but a dubbed track is also available on the disc.



Monica, the stripper on a Motorcycle seems to be a double for George's dead wife, Susan

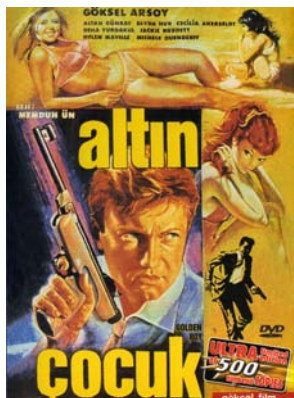
**Golden Boy
(Altun Cocuk)
1966, reissued 2009
Onar Films**

*B&W
Turkish with English or
Greek subtitles*

What do these Turkish spy films of the 60s have over, say, James Bond? Well, more women for a start. More gunfights. Lots more action. On the negative side they have uglier cars, dreadful theme songs and background music that sounds like the world's worst jazz band. The sound synchronization is almost as bad. The plots are about as believable as a Bond story, as are the villains.

Golden Boy is actually a pretty good film for its day even allowing for the black and white film, and Onar has done a magnificent job of restoring it. Goksel Arsoy, who plays agent Golden Boy, is as handsome in B&W as in colour. Somehow the B&W makes the villains look even more villainous. The formula worked and the Golden Boy series ran to three more films in quick succession.

The plot is conventional. The baddies are going to blow up Turkey's "nuclear facility" using radio waves beamed from their secret headquarters in an old lighthouse. It is Golden Boy's job to stop them, in between seducing beautiful but willing women, fighting off the evil henchmen and the occasional killing. It is all done in good fun and although it is obviously in the style of



Evil in action

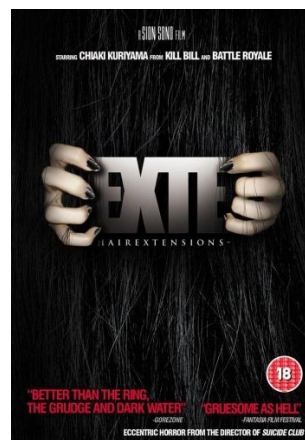
James Bond it has a Turkish style of its own – fewer gimmicks and more women.

As befits a more historic film like this there is a host of relevant extras including interviews, filmographies, biographies and an article on the Turkish spy film genre.

Web: <http://www.onarfilms.com>

**(Exte)
Hair Extensions
Revolver
Entertainment
R2 DVD**

Sion Sono is a controversial Japanese avant-garde poet and filmmaker who is best known for his cult classic *Suicide Circle*. *Exte* aka *Hair Extensions* is a truly enigmatic film filled with irony, satirical commentary, dark comedy and horror.



The stage is set in a truly saccharine sweet sort-of-way as Yuko tells us about her life working as an apprentice at the Gilles de Rais hair salon. (A strange choice of name to say to least since Gilles De Rais was a notorious French Satanist and child killer).

At the same time police find a cargo carton filled with hair and more ominously a body. When the body is examined it is found to have had all its organs removed and it seems likely the woman was the victim of international organ trafficking.



The Chief Villain



The birth of the curse.

However there is somewhat very anomalous about this cadaver, it constantly produces hair.

The local morgue is supervised by misogynist hair fetishist Yamazaki and when he sees what the corpse can do decides to steal her for himself. In the privacy of his home Yamazaki finds the corpse produces hair from every orifice and incision and with glee gloats in his new found object of affection.

Yuko comes home from work and find her older sister Kiyomi has left her child Mami with her. While Kiyomi used to abuse Yuko when she was young, she has now turned her vicious streak on Mami. Many of these scenes are the more difficult of the film as it explores the neglect and abuse Kiyomi inflicts on her child. The lives of Yamazaki and Yuko intersect when he seems Mami on the street and falls in love with her hair. He is an extremely creepy fellow but when he donates hair extensions to the Gilles De Rais Salon as samples they are happy to take advantage of his seeming kindness.

After a confrontation with Yuko and a female friend who may or may not be her partner, Mami stays with Yuko but you know trouble is store from Kiyomi.

These hair extensions are not your typical fashion accessory, since they are the result of a violent death they takes revenge on those who use them and soon terrible deaths occur to those who use them. A hairdresser slaughters her client and then herself and in quite an astounding scene one of the workers at the Gilles De Rais Salon experiences first -hand what the hair can do. With gruesome relish we see hair growing out of her eyes, an incision in her arm and then out of the head dragging the poor girl into the air; it then retreats into the body and rushing



Hair extensions in action!

throughout her body under her skin kills her.

When Yuko and her roommate are out the house, Kiyomi fools Mami into letting her in. She proceeds to steal whatever she can lay her hands on (including the hair extensions), and thrashes the place and Mami and then returns to the trashy home where she lives with her boyfriend. She again beats up Mami and shoves her in a closet. The hair extensions spring to life and attack and kill Kiyomi and her lover. Mami only barely escapes by jumping over the balcony. She winds up in hospital and becomes part of Yuko's family.

However, things go from bad to worse when Yuko uses the extensions on her friend and Mami and soon a battle unfolds in which the lives of those Yuko holds closest are put on the line.

Hair Extensions is a truly eccentric work of cinema including twisted and bizarre scenes of hair fetishism, a powerful and uncomfortable portrayal of child abuse and lots of gore and horror. The CGI of the hair extensions in action is impressive and the shocking imagery of the organ harvesting accompanied by Xmas music will haunt you for quite some time. In the U.S this was released by Tokyo Shock while in the U.K. it was released through Revolver Entertainment.



Hair everywhere

**I'm a Cyborg,
But That's OK
Tartan Films
R1 DVD**

I'm a Cyborg is an example of the true creativity of Korean cinema, combining an unusual plot with excellent character development and lots of surprises. It is also a good example of a film that you would not find in Hollywood. It crosses every possible genre boundary.



While Hollywood likes its films to be categorized and easily marketed, here is a film which is a romantic comedy set in a mental institution which mixes together every possible form of cinema. It has a darkly humorous mood but also includes set pieces which are quite confronting such as the ECT (electro shock scenes). It has sequences which could be defined as horror (especially when Young-goon as the Cyborg takes aim at the whitecoats) and some truly eccentric fantasy sequences as well. It moves between the various forms effortlessly offering a very unusual cinematic experience.

The film takes place in a mental institution filled with a truly eccentric array of patients including one who believes he has a belt around his stomach to keep him safe, a large woman with an eating disorder who believes she can fly at night and a young girl obsessed with her voice. Two of the more "on the edge" patients are Young-goon and Il-sun.

Young-goon believes she is a cyborg. Her grandmother believed she was a mouse and when she was hospitalized by the "white coats" her dentures were left at home and she was unable to eat radishes. She refused to eat and her health deteriorated. This event triggered some sort of breakdown in Young-soon who attempted to recharge herself in a wall socket leading to her institutionalization.

She believes she must return her grandmother's dentures to her to say her grannies life and find out the meaning of her own. She has developed a strange set of rules to run her life by and believes that it is only sympathy which is holding her back from achieving her goal – killing the



Young-goon and Il-sun

white coats and setting her grannie free.

Il-sun is a young male patient hospitalized for kleptomania among other conditions. He believes he can not only steal physical goods but peoples abilities ranging from ping pong styles to emotional characteristics. He believes he will vanish into a dot if he does not sustain certain ritualized behaviours and compulsively cleans his teeth to keep himself from dissolving. He wears rabbit masks to avoid emotional contact with fellow patients.

Il-sun is at first repulsed by Young-goon cyborg obsession, but soon becomes obsessed with her. Young-goon refuses to eat and even after ECT is fading to nothing. In one of the most touching scenes of the film, Il-sun convinces her that he can install and maintain a "rice-megatron" to convert food to electricity in her back and is able to convince her to eat. In some of the wilder scenes, Young-goon fantasizes about running rampant killing all the "white coats" and these are certainly filled with blood and gore. But, of course, these are just dreams and she is still locked in the hospital. As Young-goon tries to uncover the meaning of her life, she realizes her grannie was trying to tell her she is a nuclear bomb. She convinces Il-sun he must assist her achieve her goal in destroying the world.

Together they go out in the worst possible storm where Young-goon believes she will be hit by lightning and explode. However it becomes clear that while Il-sun has been helping Young-goon, he has no intention of letting her die. The film ends as strangely as it as it has unfolds with them watching the sunrise together.

Vampire Girl Vs Frankenstein Girl Eastern Eye R4 DVD

This is certainly a quirky and strange work of Japanese horror, combining a 1950's teen school love story with a gorefest of quite astounding proportions. The characters are suitably dysfunctional from the members of the wrist cutting club to the fans of U.S. president Obama who all try to look like African Americans and run the school's Ganguro club.

Monami is the new girl at school, she is also a vampire. She falls for Mizushima, but he is already dating Keiko, albeit a little reluctantly. On Valentine's Day Monami is able to slip him a chocolate, as it is the Japanese custom, while the other girls have all had their confiscated. Her chocolate is a little different, it is laced with her blood and Mizushima begins to change into a vampire. This begins a love triangle between the three that has to be seen to be believed.

When the two girls fight it out over Mizushima, Keiko falls to her death but that's not the end of the story. This is when the Frankenstein tale comes in. It seems Keiko's father believes he is a reincarnation of Dr. Frankenstein and dressed in a Kabuki outfit he carves up bodies hoping to find the secret of life. He is now thrilled to have his daughter on the table and uses a drop of Momami's blood found in the oversexed school nurse's office to re-animate her. Keiko is not the frail girl of her previous incarnation, oh no, she has been made "bigger and bigger" from body



It's amazing what blood and a cloak can do!

parts harvested by the school's nurse from students slaughtered around the school by the school's nurse who doubles as a serial killer. There are the super strong wrists of the wrist cutters, the African American legs of the Ganguro club and lungs of the Chinese teacher who comes from a land where smoke fills the air (China).

It is now on for young and old as Frankenstein builds bigger and more monstrous creations (these scenes resonate with Re-animator) and Monami kills off those who stand in her way with a greatly expanded mouth filled with very sharp teeth, never mind the help of her assistant Igor, who is now the school janitor.

The battle scenes become more and more extravagant and are made with the best CGI mixed with buckets and buckets of blood. At the same time there is a marvellously subversive sense of humour, the film is presented as a teen school story and scored with 1960's go-go girl music. This is truly a marvellously bizarre cult horror film and so extreme it is truly exhilarating.



Kabuki Frankenstein



Certainly a gorefest!

**Abraham Lincoln
Vampire Hunter
Seth Grahame-Smith
Allen and Unwin 2010**

This important historical work is Mr Grahame-Smith's follow-up to *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. In this book he examines the hidden motivations behind Lincoln's run for Presidency and the almost immediate American Civil War. They were not fighting over the secession of the southern states from the Union, nor was it about the emancipation of the slaves. It was about vampires.

Lincoln had early experience with the vampires who had come to the New World to escape persecution in Europe. In the United States they found a ready source of food for their bloody habits in the slavery practiced mostly in the South. Their influence grew and as the Abolitionist movement also grew there was bound to be conflict in the end.

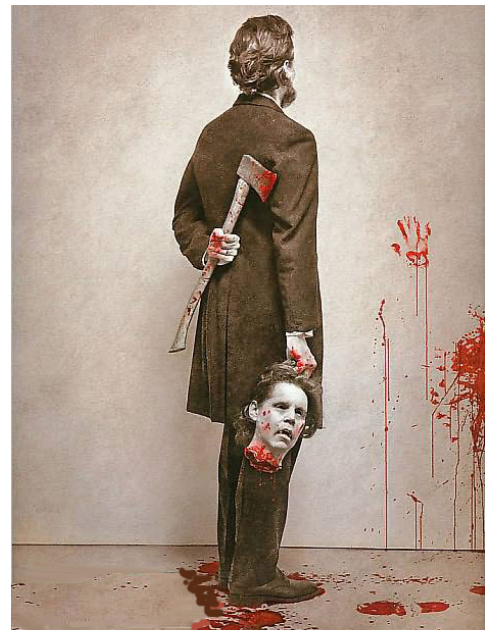
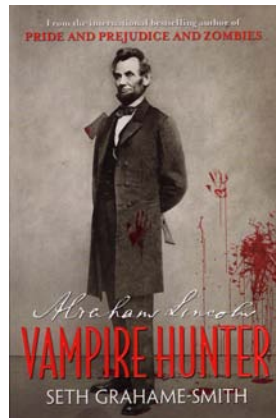
Lincoln was enlisted to the anti-vampire cause in his younger years and travelled the country bringing death to as vampires as possible. Mr Grahame-Smith's additions to the standard history of Lincoln show that Abe was dedicated in his work and hated vampires with a passion.

I hereby resolve to kill every vampire in America

As his work continued he drew the attention of vampires and his own life was placed in some risk as well.



Seth Grahame-Smith



*Thomas stood aghast.
"Look what you've done" he said after a sick-
ened silence. "You've killed us"
"On the contrary, I've killed him."
"More will come"
Abe had already begun to walk away.
"Then I shall need more stakes".*

Lincoln was particularly offended by the vampires' habit of taking sleeping children (one of his own children was later to be killed by vampires) and by the dreadful way the southern planters would prey on their Negro "food". Their actions were completely outside the law as Negroes were regarded as property, not people, and so Lincoln became a passionate speaker for rights for Negroes.

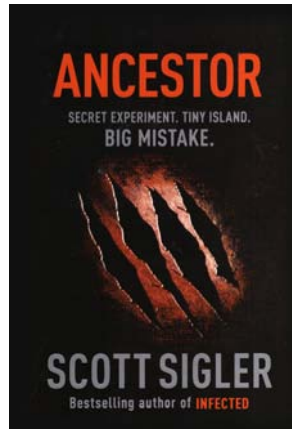
To remove the growing political and practical power of vampires in the south Lincoln had no choice but to plunge America into Civil War.

This book, based on Lincoln's secret diaries, sheds new light on Lincoln's actions.

Or that's the theory. Seth Grahame-Smith has integrated vampires seamlessly into what looks like a standard dull work. He follows closely the writing style of the original book as he completely changes Lincoln's history to one far more interesting if completely untrue. He introduces little comic notes into the otherwise serious story and he has produced a parody that completely twists Lincoln and his place in history. Yet he makes it all so plausible. He is helped by the carefully doctored illustrations. Even the cover illustrations become part of the reworked plot. American history can never be the same again.

Ancestor
Scott Sigler
Hodder & Stoughton
2010

There is a large following of science fiction that deals with the scientific advances of the present day. Although it is still popular the Star Trek type of SF is losing ground to more current issues like overpopulation and genetics.



Sigler's new novel takes us into the race to produce a genetically crafted animal whose parts are compatible with human physiology and can be used as a source of body organs for transplants. Rather than modify an existing animal the Paglione brothers' Genada company has gone back to the source. They are reverse engineering a mammalian "ancestor" creature. Because of its biological and genetic simplicity it should be simpler to reconstruct and should be free of the tissue rejection problems of the later more complex animals. Other companies have had serious accidents with gene alteration techniques.

The world's advanced countries do not take these accidents lightly. The book opens at the scene of one such accident in an isolated spot in Greenland.. The entire research facility is destroyed by a fuel-air bomb – labs, test animals, and the infected scientists. Genada is the last surviving company, and now they are after it too. The Pagliones move their research to an isolated island in the Great Lakes. For speed of evacuation the host animals (cows), and the labs are kept on board a giant C5 aircraft.

The project is under the charge of Dr Rhumkorff, an obsessed man who can see a Nobel Prize coming his way if the work succeeds. The genetic code design is being done by Jian, a geneticist loaned to the project by the Chinese Government. The Chinese are also supporting Genada with funding. She is mentally unstable but her work is successful provided her drugs are kept up. Unfortunately Dr Rhumkorff has discovered that Jian does her best work when the drugs are cut back. Jian has produced a genetic string that can be incubated inside a cow and it looks like the project may be a success.

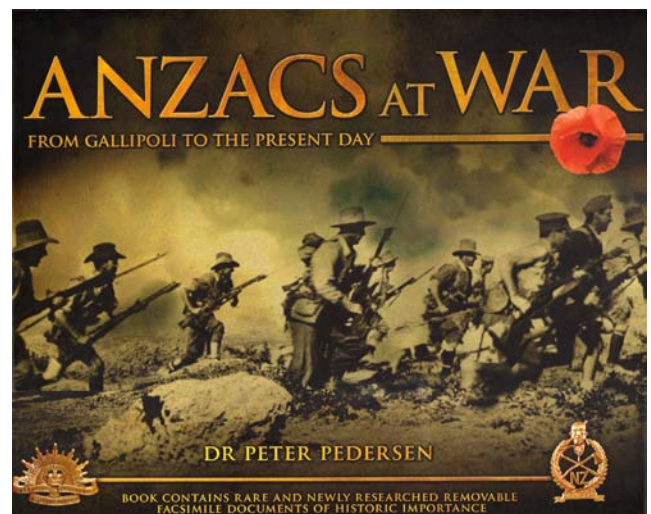
Unfortunately Jian in her unstable state has

made a major mistake. The creatures growing inside the cows are not a harmless herbivore but a savage carnivorous dinosaur with a stupendous growth rate and a corresponding appetite. These voracious monsters eat their way out of their hosts and they begin decimating life on the island.

This is not a lecture on scientists playing God. Time and again the motivation of the scientists is given as the saving of lives by organ transplant.

The motives of the Paglione brothers, however, is purely financial. They will not allow the project to be stopped under any circumstances. Their company is deep in the red. Magnus Paglione goes to the island to keep order. He is a murderous thug who will stop at nothing to save the company.

The book is well-written with constant action and well-developed characters. Although it is futuristic, the future that Sigler depicts is so close it just could just be happening now.



Anzacs at War
From Gallipoli To The Present Day
Dr Peter Pederson
Allen and Unwin (2010)

This book is presented in the same style as the recently-reviewed War In The Pacific. It comes as a hard cover book in a well-made slipcase. The book is a brief but fairly comprehensive history of the various theatres of war that shaped the ANZAC legend for Australian and New Zealand soldiers. The text is supplemented by carefully-selected photos and some excellent facsimiles of primary source documents of the time.



Gas victims (France)

Dr Pederson is a Senior Historian at the Australian War Memorial and he has given us a good reference that covers both the background and politics of the various battles and also covers the lesser-known areas like the campaign in northern Papua New Guinea and the later conflict in Korea. He also takes us to the modern day and the actions in which the two countries are involved such as “the war on terror”. He has not glossed over the blunders that were made at high levels but includes them as part of the historical record. After all, some of these blunders, such as the curious inaction by the British commanding officer at Gallipoli, led to the ANZACs’ distrust of British leadership. The better ANZAC leaders like New Zealand’s General Freyberg inspired far more loyalty among their troops.

The common antecedents of the troops gave them a better appreciation of each other and they seem to have had a rapport with their leaders that was missing with the British command-



Vietnam



Gallipoli

ers and troops. Although most of the ANZAC officers in World War I were British-trained they seemed to be a little less traditional in their military outlook and a little more willing to lead from nearer the front among their own men. This showed up well at Gallipoli and in Greece and Crete, but loyalty to one Australian commander who led the New Guinea troops valiantly from Melbourne was noticeably lacking at Kokoda.

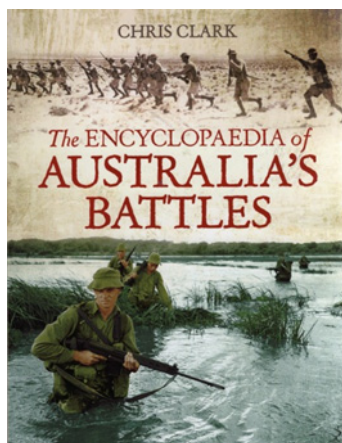
The source documents make fascinating reading as they cover the actions at their most basic level. Reading an officer’s handwritten account of an action is a bit like hearing a voice from the dead. If I had one disappointment with the book it is that there was not enough of this sort of material. I was left wanting a little more even though Dr Pederson has selected a good wide range.

With the Australian History school curriculum under review at the moment, this is the sort of book that would arouse interest in our students. The attractive presentation invites the student to explore further this vital part of the history of the two countries.



Kokoda

**The Encyclopaedia
of Australia's
Battles
Chris Clark
2010
Allen & Unwin
(2010)**



Chris Clark has a strong background in Australian military history and has a PhD from the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Currently he is the RAAF Historian and head of the Office of Air Force History in Canberra.

In this book he sets out to catalogue most of the major battles in Australia's military history from the earliest colonial days to the current action in Afghanistan. He does not only cover the formal wars but the civil unrest actions like the Eureka Stockade incident, various expeditions with the Aboriginal tribes, and actions in New Zealand in support of British forces.

"...many significant episodes of frontier conflict and civil strife or unrest which have come to carry the appellation of "battles" in popular memory".

He has taken on a tremendous job but has listed over 320 military actions in the book.

Each action is covered fairly concisely with the amount of detail being limited by scarcity of information or the sheer size of the action. Thus actions like the First World War battles or Long Tan in Vietnam are well covered, but the actions against aboriginals are often restricted to the description provided by the officer in charge. Each article is supplemented by details of relevant sources.

I was surprised at how much depth of action he could include in a brief description. Clark is not afraid to question the competence or decisions of the battle's leaders where appropriate, and in some cases there is much that should be questioned such as the use of ill-trained and under-equipped troops in the Kokoda campaign. He also notes the changing allegiances away from "the Mother Country" (Britain) towards a more cooperative and independent leaning towards New Zealand. After World War I and the massive death toll caused by incompetent British leaders this is not surprising.

It is good to see some of the lesser-known wars like Korea and the Malayan Emergency finally given their due place in our history. Surprisingly but quite rightly in view of his definition given above, he has also included the mass breakout of 378 Japanese prisoners from the Cowra prison camp in 1944. The loss of life both during the breakout and later during the roundup of the escapees was dreadful and is an important inclusion in this book.

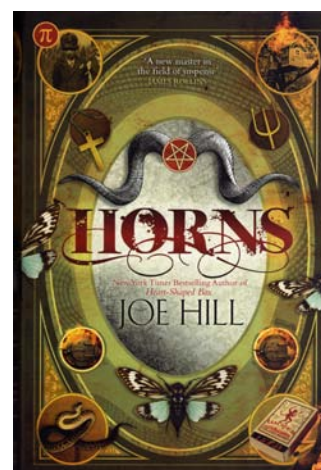
Other almost unknown battles carried out under the auspices of the United Nations are included, such as Somalia and Afghanistan, but as he points out much information on these is still classified.

With the current emphasis on Australian history being taught in our schools this book must be seen as valuable resource.

**Horns
Joe Hill
Orion Books
Gollancz (2010)**

Reviewer:
Jeremy Kong

Ignatius Perrish wakes up one morning with a massive hangover and finds he has grown horns. He has also developed a new, terrible ability. He can influence people to tell him their deepest, innermost secrets.



They can't help but tell him the truth and a lot of it is not pleasant. He can influence them to follow a particular course of action that he feels is right. No one else can see the horns and nobody suspects his new ability, so Ig starts to use his new power to try to find out who murdered his girlfriend.

The story jumps back in time and we see he was a normal kid, if a little in the shadow of his big brother. He fell in love with Merrin Williams, the girl of his dreams, at church one day. He also met Lee at the same time. Lee became his best friend, even though he was regarded as a little strange following a childhood accident.

When Merrin was brutally raped and killed Ig

was crucified by public opinion, even though there was no proof of his guilt. There was some evidence suggesting his brother may also have been involved in the killing.

As the story seesaws between past and present we see betrayal, lies and red herrings confusing the issue. Ig's new rather satanic abilities let him finally work out who the real killer was.

The story has an interesting take on the Devil and his role – he is more of a punisher than a corrupter.

“Even the Christians can't decide what to do with him. I mean, think about it – him and God are supposed to be at war with each other. But if God hates sin and Satan punishes the sinners, aren't they working the same side of the street? Aren't the judge and the executioner on the same team?”

This is the dilemma now facing Ig. Is it now time to give the Devil his due? Can Ig be judge, jury and executioner?

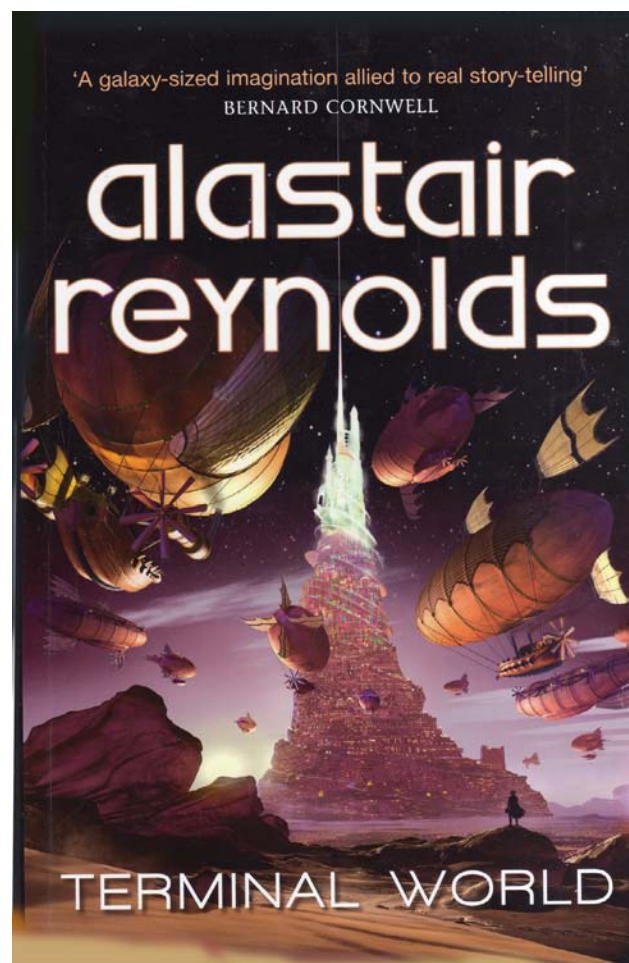
Joe Hill is a comparatively new novelist. *Horns* is only his second novel after *Heart Shaped Box*, but he has honed his skills with a range of short stories.

Many of these have been published in the compilation *20th Century Ghosts*. Already he has been awarded the Ray Bradbury Fellowship as well as numerous other awards. We look forward to more of his work.

Terminal World
Alastair Reynolds
Orion Books
Gollancz (2010)
Hachette (Australia)

Few SF writers have managed or even tried to construct a whole new world with its own physics as a setting for their novels. Frank Herbert succeeded with *Dune*, and Alan Dean Foster with *Midworld*. Now Reynolds has joined the successful ones with this monumental novel.

Thousands of years ago Earth suffered some sort of cataclysm that saw it divided into zones. The zones are not geographic but technical – they restrict the level of technology available within each zone. If the technology doesn't fit into the zone's parameters it simply doesn't work. People cannot cross freely between the zones either without the help of antizonal drugs.



Even then the drugs' effects are only temporary.

The center of the world is a huge spire formation called Spearpoint. It is so high it goes past the upper atmosphere, but even it has been settled by highly evolved humans called “Angels”. Lower down is Neon City where electricity and electrical devices work. Below that is Steamtown which has technology of a sort that would best be classified as Steampunk. Finally, at the lowest level and spreading out onto the largely unsettled plains, is Horsetown.

The world's inhabitants make the best of what they have in their own zone and trade with the other zones for medicines, machinery and food. Out on the plains it is more like the Wild West. There are the raping and pillaging Skullboys, migrating bands of devolved humans. Even worse are the Carnivorgs, a failed robot experiment that somehow manages to survive by eating human brain tissue. There is also the almost-mythical Swarm, once the protectors of Spearpoint. They live their lives almost completely in the air in their huge fleet of dirigibles, only touching down for fuel or trade.

The situation on Spearpoint is not static. The Angels have sent out exploratory teams using advanced medicines and mutations to see if they can plant agents permanently in Neon City. Their aim is to eventually take over the city. Quillon is one of the infiltration team members. He has left the team and is now hiding out in Neon City and working as a city pathologist. He learns the Angels are looking for him for the knowledge of Neon City that he has, and realises that he must leave.

With the help of Meroka, a female guide, he escapes to the Horsetown level then out onto the plains. They are captured by the Swarm.

The Swarm is carrying on open warfare with the Skullboys, who also have dirigibles of their own. Following a major battle Quillon is able to put his medical experience to work and gradually gains the trust of the Swarm leaders. Meroka turns out to be an excellent air gunner and finds a place in the crew. A woman and her mysterious daughter who were rescued from the Skullboys by Quillon also come aboard the dirigible.

There it turns out that Nimcha, the young girl, is a Tectomancer. She can influence the position of the zones. She is being called by a being living under Spearpoint. Following a major zone shift the Swarm decides to head for Spearpoint and offer medical help to the citizens of the various levels. Each person involved in the decision has their own motives, but Nimcha's seems the most important – she has the impression that she is needed to repair the faults in whatever has caused the zones to develop.

The trip to Spearpoint is not easy, crossing many zones, and once there they will face old enemies.

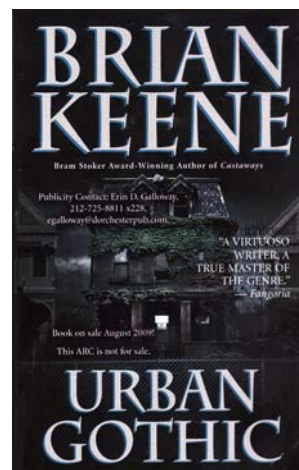
The book is brilliantly constructed and of epic length, but the long and involved plot does not get in the way of brilliant imagery.

The Swarm, particularly, comes across as a glorious Steampunk adventure, but entirely credible in the way it all works. I would love to see it made into a film.

Terminal World is a truly original piece of SF and has all the potential to become a classic.

Urban Gothic
Brian Keene
Leisure Books
Dorchester
Publishing (2009)

Brian Keene is a prolific writer of horror and in this book he is at his best. His writing is graphic, the plot is intelligent, and it has all the blood and splatter you could want.

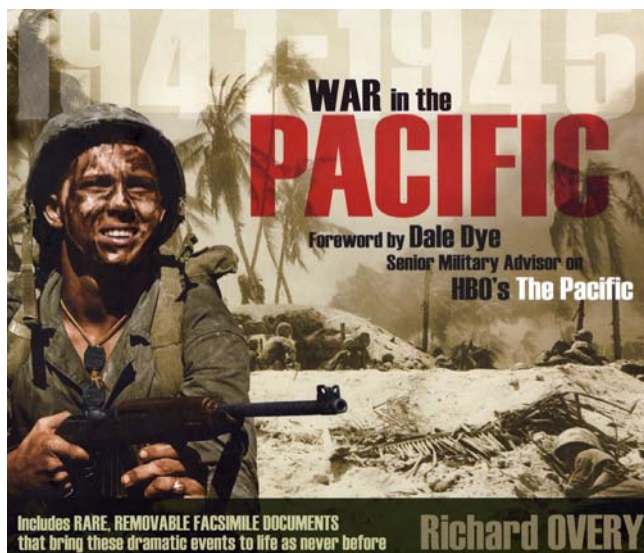


A group of young people driving back home from a rock concert are stranded in a back street in a Philadelphia slum. Pursued by a group of locals, they take refuge in an old Gothic-style house that seems to have survived urban renewal and vandals. The house is a trap. It is inhabited by a group of weird, deformed humanoids. They are the outcasts of society over many centuries, the ones who would have been left to die at birth because of their deformities and defects. They live as best they can in the house and the sewers and caverns underneath. They are cannibals and the young folks are future meals to them.

The hunt and the killings are described in graphic detail. The increasing despair as the youngsters are killed off one by one is well brought out. Even if one of them has a small victory against the monsters, there are many more creatures left. The house itself is designed as a series of traps with pitfalls, moving walls and ambush spots. The creatures have been playing this game for a long time and have prepared the house well. No one gets out.

Keene even manages to give some of the creatures a personality of sorts. There is the monster who likes to wear the skins of female victims as his "clothing", and the one who has constant cravings for necrophilia with his victims – or parts of them. We are spared nothing, not even the bleeding out and preparation of the bodies of the victims.

Maybe I'm just in a bloodthirsty mood but I found the book compelling reading. Keene has taken a standard and rather tired genre and rejuvenated it into something better and far more horrifying than average.



War in the Pacific
Richard Overy
Allen and Unwin (2010)

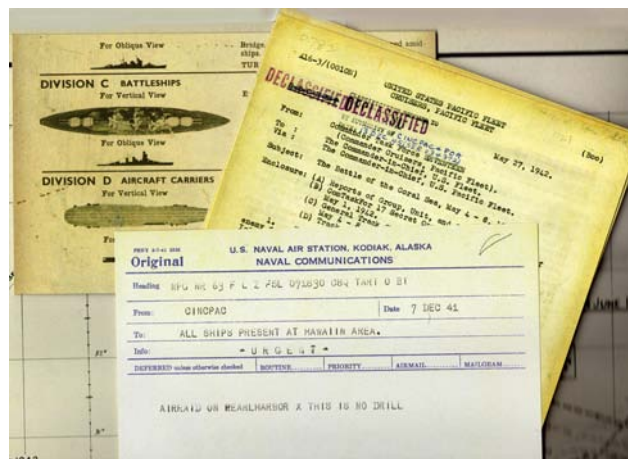
Reviewer: Bob Estreich

In 2001 the TV mini-series Band Of Brothers aired and was well received. It followed the history of A Company in the 101st Airborne Division through the war in Europe from D-Day. It was widely praised for its attention to detail and its accurate portrayal of the war from the point of view of the men who fought it.

Now HBO is doing it again for the war in the Pacific. Like Band of Brothers the new series will be produced by Tom Hanks, Steven Spielberg and Gary Goetzman. It will be based on a book by Professor of History Richard Overy of the University of Exeter in Britain. Professor Overy is an expert on World War II.

This book was issued to coincide with the release of the 10-part miniseries. To call it a book does not really do it justice. Although it does contain a brief history of the war, it also contains a vast number of photos and a group of facsimile documents that makes it more of a museum display than a book. It is not a dry history since the documents cover the personalities, the information handed out to soldiers, copies of handwritten battle reports and all the other little pieces of information that contribute to the overall picture.

These documents are produced separately and stored in envelopes inside the book. Holding one of the copies in your hand makes the event being described a lot more personal. There is even a guide to Australia for U.S. servicemen, including Australian slang.



Reproductions of original source documents

The history does not gloss over the inept handling of the forces at Pearl Harbour that led to the highly successful Japanese attack. Nor does it give the impression that the Pacific war was won solely by the U.S.

It does, however, include a facsimile of Roosevelt's draft "Day Of Infamy" speech in which he broke the news to the American people that Pearl Harbour had been attacked. This speech was notable for being one of the best bits of "spin doctoring" ever, since he knew that the attack was coming and that the Japanese ambassador had tried to officially notify the U.S. government before the bombing started.

There is also a copy of "Yank", the magazine issued to the troops. This one covers the battle for Iwo Jima. It also includes, surprisingly, a pinup girl. An article on How To Act At Home gives returning servicemen useful information such as "Don't ever try to open doors with hand grenades".

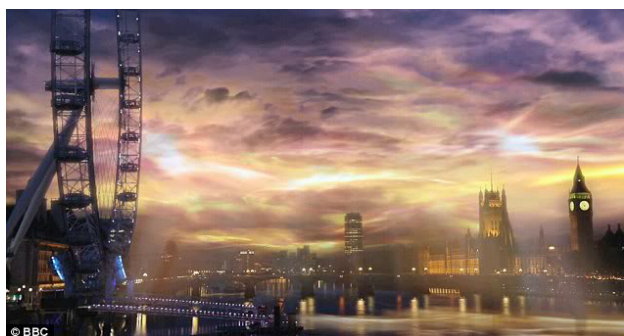
The book is hardbound and presented in a solid slipcase. The quality of the presentation matches the quality of the contents. It's a wonderful package that promises to "bring those dramatic events to life as never before".

I think it works well, and I will definitely be waiting for the TV series to come out.

Day of the Triffids
BBC
Anchor Bay
Blu Ray & DVD

John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* has been dramatised several times before and while a bit dated now, the ideas contained within it are fertile enough to trigger new growth. The mini-series from BBC goes for three hours and offers an interesting new vision of the original tale with a strong emphasis on post-apocalyptic psychology. Fans of older versions will bitterly complain about changes to the plot and the emphasis in this new series but I think we need to accept that ever new adaptation while taking inspiration from the original does not need to slavishly follow it. I am quite sick of fanatical fans decrying changes to original plots as some sort of sacrilege; the reality is that any story is going to be changed, sometimes radically, for the big screen and that each adaptation while taking some inspiration from the original, will be primarily the director's and screenwriters take on the tale. This version of *The Day of the Triffids* must be allowed to stand or fall on its own merits.

The climate change angle of the story is well developed. Taking a carnivorous plant and genetically engineering it to supply oil to resolve the world's dependence on fossil fuel is an excellent foundation to the story. The look of the plant harvesting factories, the genetically engineering process and the secrecy of multinational companies all ring true.



Superb CGI but it doesn't overpower the plot or character development



Triffids 2009 style !

The well-meaning but insane behaviour of the "triffid" liberationist is found all too often in the modern world where animal liberationists let wild animals free in urban environments thinking they are saving them. Combining the two with a global event (in this case a mass blinding caused by solar flares) works well and sets the stage for some superb storytelling and solid character development.

The CGI used throughout the film while significant does not overpower the tale, the catastrophes in the first episode (Day One) really set the stage for the more significant tale of how people behave when a worldwide disaster occurs. The triffids are stunning and you really do not see them in all their glory until the end of the first episode and this helps develop the suspense, the colour depth on the Blu Ray edition is quite superb.

The major focus of the tale is on various characters who represent different responses to the disaster. We have a small team of government officials who work in isolation aiming to relocate to the country and start civilization again with no thought of the millions of blind wandering aimlessly throughout the countryside or the triffids. They pale in significant to the tale of Coker, played by Jason Priestly and Torrence, who is played by Eddie Izzard in quite a stunning performance.

Major Coker believes that by handcuffing sighted people with the blind he can force them to look after them, a move with lots of heart, but somewhat misguided, especially with the Triffids about. Torrence, however, is another sort of character altogether. Essentially a sociopath he takes over Coker's operation and grabbing control of No.10 creates his own military dictatorship based in London.



Eddie Izzard as the perfect sociopath

There are lots of interesting characters which reflect on how people would respond to a global disaster. Vanessa Redgrave plays Durrant, a nun who seems to really care about her flock until we realize she regularly feeds the Triffids with ailing members of her community to keep them at bay. The central tale of course is the story of Bill Masen, the triffid biologist and Jo Playton, the media broadcaster and their quest not only for survival but to somehow neutralise the Triffids. They also offer the love interest in the story but surprisingly this is, for once, not overplayed!

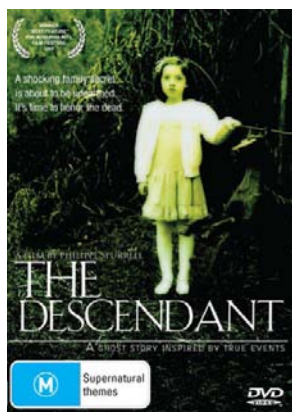
The Day of the Triffids offers a solid sci-fi experience, balancing well used special effects with character development, thought provoking themes and a new and interesting adaptation of a well-worn science fiction classic.

The Descendant Peacock Films All Region

This is a first class mystery in which we don't even know what the mystery really is almost until the end.

James Duke is going through a box of stuff his mother left him when she died a year ago. He is inspired to finally go and meet her parents to find out more about her background. She left home at an early age and never contacted them again. James was also forbidden to approach them. In a search for his family roots James tracks them down and rings them. At first his grandparents are reluctant, but finally they agree that James can visit them for a few days.

The mysteries begin almost as soon as he arrives at their little town, when a local in the bar



makes a cryptic comment about his family and their history. When James arrives at the farmhouse the mysteries start to pile up. What are his grandparents very carefully avoiding telling him?. Why have the family photos been edited?. What is the significance of the patchwork cloth and leather quilt, supposedly a family heirloom? Why does his grandmother take her old wind-up gramophone out onto the porch and play music to the cornfield, claiming "it keeps away the spirits"?

As James explores the farm, against his grandfather's instructions to stay close to the house, he strays onto the neighbouring farm. There also he meets with suspicion and is warned not to get too nosy. It appears the whole town knows about whatever the secret is, but nobody will talk about it.

James finds human bones in the cornfield and finally starts to piece together the mystery. Even then he still doesn't know how horrifying and shameful it will become. The secret has been hidden for hundreds of years, but he works out how to reveal it. Even more horribly, it has been going on until modern times. Now it's time to make amends with the dead.

A brief note at the end of the film finally sets the mystery into its historical context.

The film is superbly acted and filmed, as we have come to expect from the Canadians. In spite of the rugged timeworn beauty of the old farm the impression of something ominous is always there. Not knowing what the locals are hiding only builds up the suspense.

It is a quiet film. There is little action or blood, just a slow steady build-up to the dreadful finale. Without any giveaway clues the viewer, too, must remain in the dark like James until the very end.



Family Secrets

Dollman
Full Moon
Entertainment (1991)
Beyond Home
Entertainment
R4 DVD

Brick Bardo is a cop on the planet Arctura. He has been suspended for his unnecessary violence, but when a tough guy is needed he's the one the Police want on the scene. One particular criminal has run in to Bardo a number of times. Each time Bardo has won the fight and each time the criminal has lost more body parts. He is now just a head in a flying life-support system. Not surprisingly he has it in for Bardo.



His latest criminal venture is to threaten the planet with a dimension bomb. If set off, it will shift all the planet's inhabitants randomly into other dimensions. In a wild space chase the two crashland on Earth. Bardo finds that on Earth he is only thirteen inches high.

They land in the Bronx where Debbie, a local girl, is trying to establish Neighbourhood Watch to cut down on crime and drugs. She is kidnapped by the drug dealers and is about to be doused in petrol and set alight when Bardo appears on the scene. Even with its reduced size, his gun carries the impact of a small cannon.

There will now be war between the drug dealers and Debbie with Bardo trying to protect Debbie and her son while repairing his space ship and hunting down the criminal he is trying to catch.



B Grade Space Adventures



More than enough action and violence to keep you occupied

The criminal meanwhile has teamed up with the drug dealers and has handed over the bomb to them in return for repairing his ship.

Let's face it, this film is not great science fiction. Once they are in the Bronx the storyline becomes predictable. The special effects are not all that great either. In spite of this, I enjoyed the film. It's a good action story, competently acted, and the added twist of Bardo's size just makes it more interesting. I was almost cheering every time he blew away a dealer with his blaster. If you are after a bit of light but satisfying violence then this is a good one to try.



As in all Full Moon titles the special effects are average but more than made up for by the enthusiasm of the tale

**Edward II
Second Sight
R2 DVD**

Derek Jarman began his career as the set designer on Ken Russell's *The Devils* and from there on in took to creating unique works of cinema which embody a idiosyncratic visual sense and a distinctly queer sensibility. Jarman takes what seem like antiquated subjects and injects them with a contemporary vision which is both refreshing and breathtaking. His appreciation of character development, refreshing non-linear approach to plot and sheer audacity in cinematography make all his films unusual cinematic experiences.



In *Sebastiane* (1975), he took the life of martyred fourth century Roman soldier, who was later both canonized as Saint Sebastian and turned it into an ode to gay love, making the first film using ecclesiastical Latin !

In *Wittgenstein* (1993) he offered vignettes of the life of the greatly respected but troubled gay philosopher. In *Edward II* (1991) he takes Christopher Marlowe's rather dated Elizabethan drama about the downfall of the weak gay monarch Edward II.

In Jarman's hands this takes on a new and powerful relevance, while he respects the historicity of Marlowe's text to a surprising degree he subverts it to offer a powerful message about the suppression of sexual minorities. At the same time Jarman does not rewrite history, Edward II



Marlowe's play used to tell a new story



and his lover, while clearly victims of homophobia, are not depicted as gay saints. Edward seems to spend his days in constant self-indulgence rather than attending to the needs of his kingdom and hence regardless of his sexuality is not especially likeable. He mistreated his wife, degrades his role and refuses to attend to his duties.

The way in which Jarman depicts events in the film is novel and innovative. Imagery flickers between traditional period costume and a contemporary look. At times the conspirators are in period costume, at other times in modern business suits. Clashes over homophobia range from the historical to modern including quite potent scenes where AIDS protesters clash against English police. This is especially significant considering the narrowness of the English government of the period and the fact that Jarman was living with the virus himself.

With superb performances by Tilda Swinton, a superb musical number by Annie Lennox and solid character development all round, this is a surprisingly and revelatory adaptation of a classic work made relevant to the modern age.

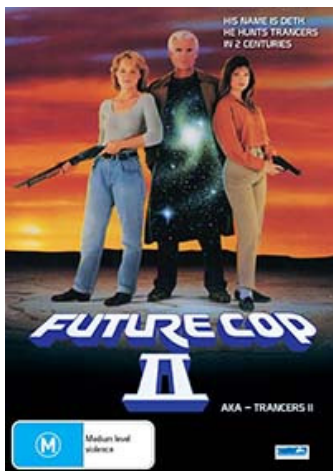
The remastered edition from Second Sight is a joy to behold and includes Derek's Edward, a documentary featuring interviews with a range of individuals involved in the film and with gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell.

**Future Cop II
Full Moon
Big Sky Video
R4 DVD**

Future Cop II aka *Trancers II: The Return of Jack Deth* is a B Grade sci-fi film from the prodigious cult movie director, Charles Band. Dating from 1991 it actually has a very 80's look and feel and mixes a time travel story with a detective even film noir mood. It is certainly a low budget affair but that makes it even more amusing, it is one of those films which is so very bad it is good. It was a follow-on from the quite successful *Trancers*.

It stars Tim Thomerson as Deth with surprising support from Helen Hunt who must look back at this film with some amusement considering her later success. There is also the always evil Richard Lynch as the greenie cult leader, Jeffrey Combs in a minor role and Megan Ward, who appears in many Charles Brand films.

Captain McNulty is sent back to Los Angeles 1991 and lands in the body of his ancestor, a 15 year old girl, a great source of mirth. His task is to bring Jack Deth back to the future but Jack has been living in L.A. for quite some years and has a new life, not to mention a new partner. Unbeknown to Jack, his deceased wife from the future was retrieved from a time just before her murder and send back to the present but she has landed in a mental institution. As fate would have it she has been moved from the institute to



**Tim Thomerson & Helen Hunt in
Trancers II: I am sure she looks back at this
role in amusement !!**

"GreenWorld", a greenie cult run by E.D. Wardo. The truth, however, is worse than they realize as "GreenWorld" is actually a trancer factory. GreenWorld takes mentally ill people and the homeless off the street and using mind control and drugs turns them into zombies under Wardo's control.

Trancers are zombies whose minds are controlled by Wardo and are on a mission to murder Jack and Hap Ashby. Hap used to be a famous baseball player but in the present is a rich alcoholic, in the future his descendant will become a member of the great council, but not if he is killed first. Jack must protect him at all costs.

"You know the council's going out of their way to keep you alive so you can procreate!"

As the story unfolds Jack is united with his two wives and must battle domestic squabbles, murderous trancers and protect Hap from the booze as well as from those who want to kill him, not a simple task.

Future Cop II is filled to the brim with clichés, some truly "memorable" dialogue and some pretty bad acting. But somehow this all ties together to become a marvellously fun cult sci-fi film.

It is one of those films which knows it has a limited budget and simply revels in its genre roots. It has developed quite a following and four sequels were made.



Trancers Attack

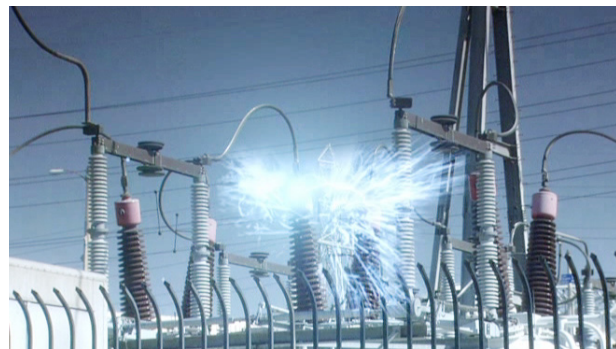
**Ground Zero:
The Deadly Shift**
Peacock Films
R4 DVD

This is a low budget film with good acting and an intelligent story. The budget means a lot of inside shots, few sets and a minimum of splashy special effects.

There appear to be some stock shots cut into the film but they are used fairly sparingly and integrate well with the plot.

The Iranians have test fired a nuclear weapon in an underground bunker. The test has, of course, been picked up by U.S. satellites. The National Security Advisor has decided to advise the President to carry out a nuclear strike on Iran before any more weapons are fired, possibly at the U.S. What the satellites did not pick up is the effect of the electromagnetic pulse (EMP) from the weapon on the Earth's largely iron core. It is the rotation of the earth and its core that generates the magnetosphere, a magnetic field around the earth. This deflects solar radiation. The Earth's rotation is now slowing noticeably and the magnetosphere is weakening. More solar radiation is making it to the surface and people are dying of a sort of radiation sickness. Worse, the continents are starting to move and earthquakes are now a daily occurrence. They are getting more severe.

One scientist has predicted that this could happen – he thinks that the last time it happened it may have led to the extinction of the dinosaurs – but without facts to support his case he has



Occasional good special effects with an effective storyline and solid character development

been laughed out of the scientific community. His previous best friend, another scientist, is a strong believer in gathering the facts but lacks the ability to put them all together and form a theory from them. These two must get together, forget their grievances and cooperate to convince the military not to drop the nuclear bombs. These will surely further disturb the core of the Earth and mean the end of civilisation.

I quite enjoyed the film, even without too many special effects. It allows the personalities of the characters to develop and this makes the whole story more believable. Good characterisation IS a substitute for CGI.



Disaster hits

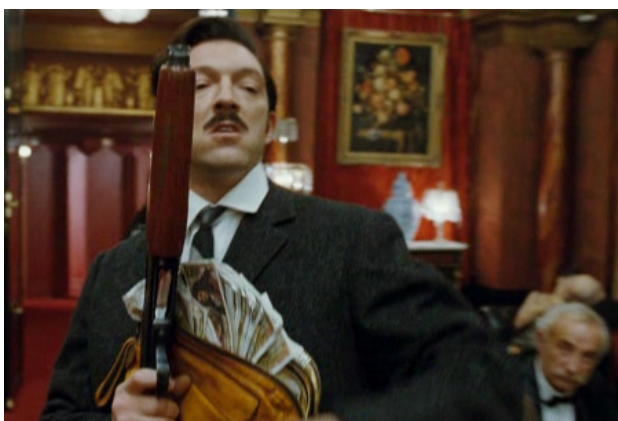
**Mesrine:
Public Enemy #1
Madman
R4 DVD**

French with English subtitles.

This is a dramatisation of the life and crimes of Jacques Mesrine, a French criminal who held the dubious distinction of being France and Canada's Public Enemy No. 1. It is a massive set at 246 minutes, spread over two DVDs. Because of the length of the show Director Jean-Francois Richet has managed to build up the personality of the man, not just his criminal history.

Mesrine was known at school for his violent attacks on other students. When France was fighting the independence movement in Algeria he joined the Army and the film opens with an example of his brutality towards the Algerian citizens. On his discharge he was left with no career opportunities, so he joined a friend in burglary and bank robbery. Their boss lectured him on the importance of "respect", both to those higher up than him and from his own subordinates. This seems to have stayed with him all his life and was later to play a part in his downfall.

Meanwhile, though, the bank robbery business was successful and profitable. Too successful. His work attracted the attention of a rival gang and he narrowly missed an assassination attempt. He fled to Canada and branched out from bank robbery to kidnapping when he lost his job. The inevitable happened and he was captured and sentenced to prison in one of Canada's toughest corrective institutions. Surpris-



Life and crimes of Jacques Mesrine



Ready for a shoot out

ingly he managed to escape but had to return to France.

Once again he went back to bank robbery but his bravado was building up. A successful escape from a courthouse only added to this but his time was running out. He tried to ally himself with terrorist groups in a search for some sort of legitimacy (respect?), but they were distancing themselves and even his long-time friends were becoming wary of his constant taunting of the police and his irrational political rantings. One of his friends pointed out that he seemed to want to destroy the system but they wanted it to survive so they could milk it. His robberies were becoming increasingly violent and often involved running gunfights with the police as they made their escape. With every success his ego grew. So did the body count, estimated at around forty dead.

Mesrine now made it to Public Enemy #1 in France and the police made a concentrated effort to catch him. Realising his life in France was over, he arranged to leave the country again. Could he escape before the police tracked him down?

Mesrine is an unsympathetic character with his bragging and posturing, and like a Shakespearean tragedy hero he carries the makings of his own downfall. One of his major failings is that he seems to believe his own propaganda. Another is that, while he admits the probability that he will be killed by the police, he doesn't seem to believe that it will really happen. He relies on changes of appearance and extreme caution to keep him safe. Will it be enough? Can he gain the respect that he seems to crave, from the police or the public?

The film is well acted and produced and I didn't find the subtitles at all intrusive to the flow. The action is almost continuous so be prepared to spend a lot of time on the edge of your seat.

Ninja Assassin
Warner Bros
Blu Ray Region B

Larry and Andy Wachowski of Matrix fame once again team with James McTeigue, director of V for Vendetta to produce this piece of wild action packed ninja fluff starring pretty boy Korean pop star Rain as Raizo. While Larry and Andy Wachowski may have produced a cinema changing series with the Matrix, they have never really matched this in any of their other films. Ninja Assassin is much the same, lots of gloss and great action, but not much substance. This does not take away from its enjoyment value but does limit its appeal.



Nine Ninja clans have been around since time immemorial, working as secret societies training killers for governments and anyone who can pay their price of 100 pounds in gold. In modern times they work for governments and big business alike, but it is the Ozunu clan which has really made it good. They steal children off the street and train them using the most brutal means imaginable to become vicious killing machines. Unlike other Ninja films, these Ninja's are shown as the equivalent of Yakuza clans, violent, cruel and irredeemable vicious.

Raizo has proved himself a great asset to the clan but he finds himself somehow incomplete, his only friend is a kunoichi (female ninja) Kiriko. But Kiriko finds the ninja life too violent and when she attempts to escape is brutally slain before his eyes. Her killing puts doubts in his mind but the life he is leading and he begins to plot his revenge. After completing his first politi-



Bloodied Hero in Ninja Assassin



Korean Pop Star Rain as Raizo

cal assassination for the clan, staging an especially brutal killing of a mob boss, he slashes the face of the Lord Ozunu and escapes. He now plans how to bring the whole ninja system to a halt.

Europol agent Mika Coretti (Naomie Harris) has been investigating a series of unusual political murders and makes a strange discovery; each of the murders is preceded by a payment which is equivalent to a hundred pounds of gold. Working together with another agent they soon uncover a network of assassins for hire used by governments and big business worldwide for their own "black ops". This discovery puts them in grave danger and it is only with Raizo's intervention that Mika survives a ninja hit. Together Mika and Raizo work together to expose the ninja but soon find that her own agency has been infiltrated and it is hard to know who to trust. As the body count reaches truly astronomical levels, a show-down looms when Raizo returns to the once secret Ozunu headquarters to destroy their murderous reign once and for all.

Ninja Assassin is pretty silly stuff; the plot and characters are simply props for the ninjas and their superbly choreographed violence. But the Ninjas are rather impressive, I don't think they have ever been so well portrayed on screen. The way they appear like shadows from the dark, the ferocity of their attacks and the superb martial arts action really makes this a real winner. This is an action film "par excellence", you know what you expect when you see the cover and you get it by the bucket load. This is not a particularly deep film but with lots of martial arts action and a ridiculously high body count what more could you want?

Special features include The Story of the Ninja: Myth, Lore, Training and Combat, the Extreme Sport of a Ninja, training Rain: transforming a singer/dancer/actor into a powerful ninja and deleted scenes.



subtle humour and sense of the ridiculous. I didn't think the French could do comedy this well, but now I know better.

OSS117: Lost In Rio
Films / Gaumont
ICA Films
R2 DVD

French with English subtitles

He's at it again. France's top agent, Hubert Bonisseur, known as OSS117, manages to offend the other side of the world in this wonderful Bond spoof. It all starts in Gstaad where, while après-ski partying, he manages to wipe out a clan of Chinese baddies whose relatives thereafter have it in for him.

He is sent on assignment to Rio to recover a



That could have worked out better



microfilm from an ex-Nazi. The French will pay well for the microfilm since it contains a list of names of collaborators from World War II. There is a problem in the form of the Israeli Mossad, who want the ex-Nazi taken to Israel to answer for his war crimes. The local loud-mouth CIA agent Bill Trumendous is also interested – the list of names could be useful to pressure France. The Nazis have an unsuspected reason for wanting to kill Bonisseur. The Chinese, of course, just want to kill him for killing their relatives. If he survives all the men (and women) with guns, his fear of heights may just kill him anyway.

Bonisseur's complete lack of cultural sensitivity comes to the fore once more as he manages to insult Jews, women, Chinese, Brazilians, women, hippies, Nazis, Jews, and especially women. His CIA friend is almost as bad – he is a foulmouthed chauvinist. Bonisseur gets his comeuppance, though. He is given the ultimate insult – he is told that he is old and poorly dressed ! This to a man who wears a Robin Hood outfit to a Nazi gathering !

Fortunately he is assisted by a gun that shoots an unlimited number of shots and only runs out when he is holding Chinese or Nazis at gun-point. He is also helped by the fact that nobody, Chinese, Nazi or Hubert himself, can shoot straight even at point blank range. As he blunders along through the plot, being politically incorrect at every turn, it is hard to know who's going to finally get to shoot him.

Once again director Michel Hanavicius gets the Bond feel perfectly right, even down to the way Bonisseur enters an office. Once again he does it in such a subtle way that we can suspect he is spoofing the Bond films, not just copying them. The film is another good laugh for those who remember the Bond days fondly..

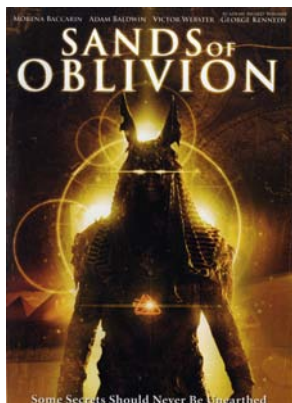
Sands of Oblivion
Anchor Bay / Starz
R1 DVD

I had trouble with this film. Although it is well directed and features good actors like Adam Baldwin and an elderly George Kennedy it has enough errors in it that I felt a little let down. This was not helped by a feeling that I had seen it all before as far as the plot was concerned. For a start (and in fact in the starting scene) some of the CGI looks like – well, CGI.

Studios are capable of much better than this. There are odd details all the way through the film – in the compulsory car chase the vehicle lights are on, but the scene then changes to broad daylight. Why are the floodlights at the archaeological dig turned on during the middle of the day?

Even the explosion at the end, when the monster is destroyed by exploding a box full of white phosphorus grenades with a missile, is very low budget. It is points like this that stopped the film from being much better than it is.

As far as the plot goes, it seems to be a mash up of many similar stories. In ancient Egypt the god Im-La-Ra, god of chaos, starvation and general strife, has been locked up in a hidden temple room for centuries. He is safely confined as long as he does not get possession of an amulet that is keeping him locked in. If he does, nothing can stop him from unleashing the ancient plagues of Egypt upon the world.



A bit of B grade CGI

Cecil B de Mille in the 1920s made The Ten Commandments in sandhills on the California coast. He imported many artefacts from a newly excavated Egyptian city including, naturally, the sarcophagus of the ancient god. Once the film was made he ordered the sets buried under the sand. Now they are being excavated as a historical monument before a new channel is dredged through the sandhills. The god gets loose, as they do, and begins his campaign of terror with the archaeologists.

Like all gods / mummies / resurrected people he has superhuman strength and shape changing abilities. He must be stopped by the female archaeologist leading the team, her estranged husband and her new boyfriend. Does this all sound familiar?

The characters are fairly routine, from the ex-Gulf War Looney gun hoarder to the nerd who will get his head cut off to the Comic Sheriff. It is only the good acting that saves the characters from mediocrity.

On the positive side the scenery is beautifully



Rather over the top to say the least



Some well know faces but that is not enough to save the film

filmed and the blood and gore effects are first class. The plot, for all that it is highly derivative, is fast-moving and well done.

Even the dialogue is reasonably intelligent. Im-La-Ra in his various guises is well-conceived and effective even if the CGI does let him down a little. Although there are occasional lighter moments the horror and suspense never really let up for the length of the film.

The film was originally made for cable TV and this may be partly the reason for the low budget. Nevertheless it is a good piece of horror and worth watching.

The only extra is the usual "Making of ..."

Savages Crossing
Winnah Films
Anchor bay
Entertainment
R4 DVD

This is another one of those films designed to encourage tourists to stay away from Australia's out-back.

Phil has just been released from prison and he is coming back to demand money from his wife – even though he has previously gambled away most of the family's assets. Phil is a psycho killer and his time in prison has not improved his attitude. His wife knows this and has secretly hired a gunman to dispose of Phil.

All the protagonists are stuck in the local road-



John Jarrett is a bit typecast as the homicidal maniac

house when a flash flood covers the Savages Crossing bridge. As well as Phil and his family there are two young girl tourists, the owner of the roadhouse and the girl who runs it for him.

They will all be involved in Phil's bloody campaign to get the money he believes is his right and all will suffer at Phil's hands.

The action never stops and the tension continues to rise right through the film. John Jarrett is becoming typecast as the homicidal maniac with the disarming smile (see Wolf Creek) but he does it so well as he drags the story from crisis to crisis.

Craig McLachlan as the roadhouse owner / truck driver is a bit overshadowed by him, but still turns in a creditable performance as the laconic but competent outback type. It's nice to see Angela Punch McGregor again as Phil's estranged wife. Her personality change from the desperate wife to the hard old tart who hires killers is startlingly effective.

It's a good film, well scripted and brilliantly acted. It is definitely worth a look.



The action never stops



The Take
Beyond H.E. 2009
R4 DVD

This is the type of film at which the British and Irish excel - strong plot, first-class acting and steady action. It is hard to find a sympathetic character in the film as they are all dragged down, even the kids.



Freddie is just out of prison. He is a nasty piece of work, vicious, irresponsible and completely amoral. He fully intends to go back to his old criminal ways but there are some things he must do first. He is picked up by his cousin and lifelong friend, Jimmy, and taken to a getting-out party. The boss of their gang, Ozzie, is also in prison, and at the party they are met by Siddy, his second-in-command who makes it clear that he is taking over the gang and Freddie will answer to him in future.

Freddie takes his revenge on the criminal who didn't turn up in time to get him away from his failed robbery. He is living well on Freddie's share of the money. The attack makes Siddy irate since it was an unsanctioned action. Freddie is given a part in a security company holdup but later in the club where they are to divide up the spoils he is told he won't be getting a share as punishment. He smashes a bottle and cuts Siddy's throat. Later Jimmy visits Ozzie in prison and explains to him that there was a gang takeover happening and Ozzie is at least satisfied for the time being.

Gradually Freddie climbs up the criminal hierarchy, starting with running one of Ozzie's clubs. He gets involved in Ozzie's drug trade as well and is trusted with negotiations with a new supplier, the McCoy brothers. Impulsive and half

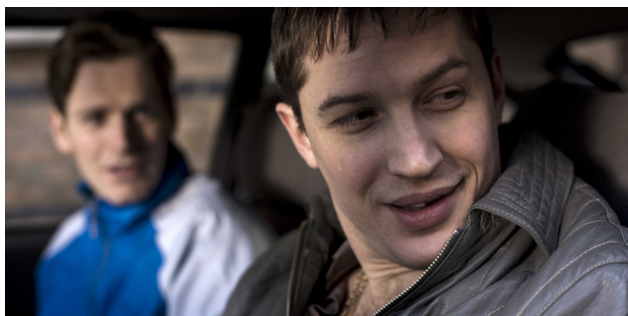
drunk, Freddie holds up one of their dealers. Ozzie has to smooth things out but he now looks on Freddie as a loose cannon and gives the drug business secretly to Jimmy.

At home things aren't improving either. Freddie's tarty girlfriend has two kids by him and after the getting-out party she has another one on the way. Freddie's whoring and drinking are dragging her down and she is taking happy pills and an increasing amount of alcohol to keep going. In spite of this she still loves him. Worse, though, Freddy has eyes for her sister Maggie - Jimmy's wife. He is also sleeping with Ozzie's sister and any other female he can get horizontal.

He finds out about Jimmy's drug business and is extremely jealous. The friendship starts to break up. One day while Jimmy is away he enters their house and rapes Maggie. She has a child from the rape and Freddy now has another enemy.

With Freddie hated by so many people, constantly full of drugs and alcohol and less capable of running Ozzie's business, Ozzie warns Jimmy that Freddy will have to die before he kills Jimmy. Jimmy, previously the weaker of the two, is toughening up and finally accepts that he will have to kill his best friend. Freddy, however, is also aware that Ozzie will have Jimmy kill him. He must get Jimmy before Jimmy gets him. He also arranges an attempt on Ozzie's life. Before either of the men can act on their plans there is a tragedy that affects everyone and brings their lives down even further.

The four-part series was originally aired as a TV show. This is often a weakness because the breakup into episodes can cause viewers to "lose their place" especially in a plot as complex as this one. In a DVD reissue there is no continuity problem. The story was so gripping I watched all 176 minutes in one sitting. It is a superb piece of drama at its best and I recommend it.



Jimmy and Freddie

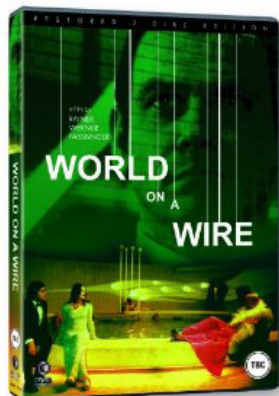


World on a Wire Second Sight R2 DVD

World on a Wire is a unique sci fi classic by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, restored to an astounding level of quality by the Fassbinder foundation. The film itself is considered rather rare; it was originally broadcast on German television and then fell into obscurity. While the rest of the Fassbinder "canon" made it onto DVD in various editions, this is a late addition. The release from Second Sight comes on two DVDs with a comprehensive documentary called "Fassbinder's World on a Wire: Looking Ahead to Today".

While *Avatar*, *The Matrix Trilogy*, *eXistenZ*, *13th Floor*, *Dark City* and other Hollywood films have explored the world of computer simulated realities, the concept can actually be traced right back to the 1973 film *World on a Wire* by Fassbinder, which itself was an adaptation of a 1964 novel *Counterfeit World* by Daniel Galouye. It is amazing to think this film predated *The Matrix* by some 26 years!

Somewhere in the future there is a radical state run computer project called Simulacron one of which is able to simulate a full featured reality, it creates a world populated with identity units each of which is programmed with artificial intelligence. Henry Vollmer the project leader Henry Vollmer commits suicide and his successor, Vollmer's previous assistant, takes over the project. Dr. Fred Stiller also begins to have very



Strange realities in Fassbinder's exploration of science fiction

odd experiences. A good friend, Guenther Lause disappears in the middle of a conversation and a week later nobody seems to remember him at all. Are these signs of a mental breakdown or something happening with the Simulacron?

World on a Wire is marked by superb cinematography by Michael Ballhaus who manipulates light, reflection and space to create a strange cinematic experience which blurs the line between illusion and reality. It must be said the Seventies clothing and sets are amusingly dated but add to the surrealism of the film.

This is a fascinating science fiction film produced by a filmmaker of quite some significance. Until now it has been exceedingly rare and it is marvellous to have it available in such a superior edition. While it is quite a marathon, coming in at some 204 minutes you will be rewarded by a truly original and innovative sci fi experience.



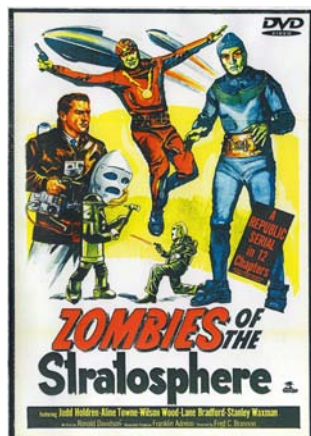
Just what is real ?



Fascinating use of mirrors to represent the blurring of reality and illusion

**Zombies of the Stratosphere Serial (1952)
B&W
Cheezy Flicks
All Region NTSC**

Before your very eyes you'll see rocket ships in strato-flight ... strange creatures from another world ! Rocket Men fighting robots ! Deadly machines and weapons in action !



Ah, yes, Saturday afternoons at the matinee. Scores of snotty kids watching cheaply produced films and having the time of their life. This DVD will bring back the memories.

The matinee format was pretty standardised – Bugs Bunny or Woody Woodpecker cartoons, a ten-minute episode of a serial, then the main feature. It is the serial part that Cheezy Flicks has given us here. *Zombies* was made by Republic Pictures, a prolific producer of low-budget films. They also did higher budget films starring actors like John Wayne and Gene Autry but the company's poor management eventually saw many of their main drawcard actors moving on to other companies. One or two of their films have become classics, such as *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) and *Rio Grande* (1950).

Zombies is not one of the high-budget classics. It fairly screams "low-budget" with its constant repetition of scenes, the extended recaps of previous episodes, and its frequent reuse of outside locations. The acting is fairly OK (the cast list shows Leonard Nimoy, but try as I might I couldn't pick him out) but the plot is quite unbelievable.

The stunts are also unbelievable – people jump from boats, trains, cars, tanks and mine trolleys – but their hats stay on. As for the sets, castor-footed office chairs in a spaceship? That's going to be helpful when you take off.

"Base to rocket. Base to Larry's rocket".

There are no zombies and they never get anywhere near the stratosphere. Martians have landed on Earth. Their intention is to explode an atomic bomb that will throw the Earth out of orbit and send it, as we are repeatedly told, "spinning off into space".



Martian Spaceship

The Martians will then use the same technique to nudge their planet into Earth's old orbit so they can enjoy the dense atmosphere and warmer climate that is missing on their frigid world. Can the Earth be saved from their evil plan?

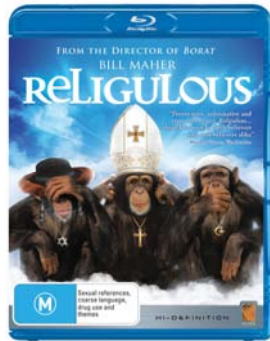
Against them is a small group of the most inept "agents" I have ever seen outside *Get Smart*. They have their own rocket ship and one of the agents has a backpack rocket suit with apparently unlimited fuel. Every time he tilts his head up to see forward the rocket pack tilts down. His pants must be fireproof. The agents and the aliens all carry guns but don't worry, kiddies, nobody actually gets shot until the end. Despite both sides expending literally hundreds of shots at ranges down to a few metres, every shot misses and it doesn't occur to anybody that it's time to get a shotgun. One agent is, however, hurt (twice) when an alien throws a gun at him in frustration. I know how he must have felt. There are many high-speed boat chases and an enemy submarine but it never seems appropriate to call in the Navy. Despite the Martian rocket ship coming and going at will the Air Force is not called in either.

The blame goes to Director Fred C Brannon, whose other classic serials like *G-Men Never Forget*, *Radar Patrol vs Spy King* and *Flying Disc Man From Mars* were matinee staples.

I guess the kids of the day were less critical than they are now. It was just cheap thrills to them, spread over twelve Saturday afternoons. To many of us, though, it was the big entertainment part of each week.

Religulous
Bill Maher
Icon Films Blu Ray
R4 DVD

The word Religulous was coined by Maher as a blend of the two words "religion" and "ridiculous". As a work of cinema Religulous is hard to classify – it is a documentary, a comedy, a commentary and a tour of religious insanity worldview.



Bill Maher is a highly successful stand-up comedian and after some years of reflection on religion realized the breathtaking stupidity of believing such superstition and became an atheist. Religulous is his exploration of religious beliefs and certainly packs in the laughs, while at the same time reflecting deeply on why people can believe such incredible things.

There are many ways to try and stimulate people to use critical thinking about religion. Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and others tend to use science and education, Maher realizes the value of humour and uses ridicule to great effect.

The director of Religulous is Larry Charles who also directed Borat. He has a knack of choosing the right people to interview, he realizes that with certain people if you "give them enough rope they will hang themselves" and they certainly do that. It is frightening to hear what these people really think when only a little pressure is applied. From the US congressman who admits "there is no IQ test to get into congress" to Moslems who demand free speech to advocate Jihad but justify the Fatwa issued against Salman Rusdie to a ex-Jew for Jesus who would welcome a nuclear attack as it is a sign of the end times and brings him closer to his Lord.

It would be fair to say Religulous is "preaching to the converted", the pure venom of the commentary, the slanted humour of the questions and the presentation of the program is clearly based on an atheist worldview. I certainly couldn't see any religious person sitting through it. However, it may prove of value to those who are "nominally" religious or "Sunday Christians" who need a jolt to reconsider the superstitions they hold so dearly and the cost to not only their rationality but the mankind of holding such outmoded beliefs.



Maher and "Jesus" at the Creation Theme Park !

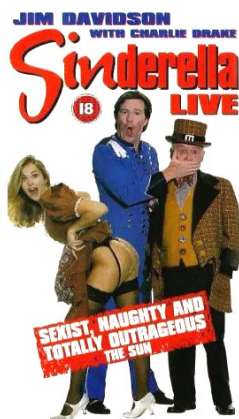
There are some moments of sheer theatre such as the bizarre Creation Museum or the Holy Land theme park, one could also add Maher being thrown out of the Vatican and off Mormon property. I especially loved when he told an "ex-gay" preacher that he still looked gay and when he hugged him goodbye asked if he got a hard on !

While the film was well received and was surprisingly successful at the box office there were mixed reviews. The primary criticism was that Maher did not treat religious figures with respect. Personally I find such criticism misguided, Maher (as do most atheists) sees preachers, pastors and other related kin as flim-flam salesman. They are selling a product which nobody can see never mind prove. Products such as life after death in heaven and love from an invisible friend for life are such winners as they make the buyer feel good but cost nothing to produce. The downside is the loss of rationality and self-respect buying such a product causes. Any other salesman selling such a product would be charged with fraud so why give respect to those who prey on the weak, sick and emotionally challenged.

While Religulous is funny, nasty, venomous and incisive, the ending is reflective and powerful. As Maher so rightly notes, religious beliefs have brought man to the edge of an abyss. The End times may be near not because Jesus is about to return, but because religious extremists want to use any means they can to enforce their values on the world and we need to wake up and smell the bullshit before it is too late.

Sinderella Live
Universal
R4 DVD

This is without a doubt the funniest film I have watched in a long time. Pantomime is a rather stylised form of theatre that dates back to the ancient Greeks. By the 16th century the pantomime had become set in much the form we know today with its standard characters, ritualised plots and occasional slapstick. As well as the play itself the show would often contain song and dance routines. In Britain Pantomime seemed to be put on mostly around Christmas. It became a standard part of kids' entertainment at this time.



The standard characters usually include the hero, handsome but not always intelligent and if particularly young often played by a girl; Buttons the servant who keeps the plot moving; the attractive young heroine; the Dame who is usually played by a large man; and for some reason the pantomime horse which is driven by two men in a fakey-looking horse costume.

The plots, such as they are, are based on fairy stories like Cinderella, Goldilocks or Dick Whittington. The plot usually has little relevance to the original story, being adapted so certain standard scenes can be inserted. The audience is expected to participate vigorously, booing the villain or cheering the hero, and even their responses have become somewhat stylised (Oh, no she didn't! Oh, yes, she did!)

This version of the classic Cinderella is definitely not for the kiddies. Although it follows the



The Ugly Sisters

pantomime conventions it adds a very adult note to the gags. It has that smutty humour that only the British seem able to do without it being offensive. It is, instead, just very very funny.

"He took me back to his flat and threw me on the bed. Then he whispered those magical words"

"Come on fatso – fart and give us a clue?"

Jim Davidson has taken the tired old pantomime genre and given it a whole new look. Jess Conrad as Prince Charles (sorry, Prince Charming) outcamps Liberace and features genitals that seem to become bigger and more "outstanding" throughout the show. Even the horse is, shall we say, very well equipped. Veteran comedian Charlie Drake, playing Baron Hardon, mumbles his way through the show so effectively that it's hard to tell if he is actually acting – maybe he really is a very dirty little old man. He also seems to have an alcohol problem and it is hilarious watching him improvise when he forgets his lines. Regardless, his part is one of the best in the show the way he plays it. The ugly sisters, Madonna and Camilla, are of course particularly fat, ugly and vulgar.

"Come with me, Prince Charming, and I'll give you a 68"

"A 68?"

"Yes, it's like a 69 but you go down on me and I'll owe you one."

The actors ham it up for all they are worth and the audience is with them all the way. It is rare to see such a fusion between actors and crowd in a live show. The show toured for six months and was translated to videotape. The DVD suffers a little with sound quality sometimes, but this is a very minor problem with what is otherwise a great show.



Prince Charming does Liberace

**Groper Train
Search for the Black
Pearl
PinkEiga
NTSC**

Here's one for the fetish fans. Apparently (I can't speak from personal experience) it is a popular fantasy to grope young women on the crowded Japanese commuter trains. They may or may not enjoy this, but in this film they seem happy to be groped and fingered by dirty old men.



The story revolves around this fetish. There are in fact quite a few stories in the Groper Train series by director Yojiro Takita.

A fabulous black pearl was stolen from China during the Japanese occupation and last turned up in Japan, brought home by the sole survivor of an Army raiding team. He dies in the throes of sex with his attractive wife and his last words are "Pussy Picture".

A Pussy Picture is made by inking a woman's private parts then pressing paper onto them. He was a collector of these pictures but following a fire he only has half of one picture left. This seems to be the picture he was referring to. The remnant looks a little like a map. Could it show where the Black Pearl is hidden?

The picture was taken from his niece, so the wife and her stepson must find the missing niece and get the rest of the picture. They hire a private detective to make Pussy Pictures of as many women on the Groper Train as possible, hoping to find the niece and get the rest of the picture. Against all the odds this works, but the completed picture still tells them nothing. They



Completed print but where does it lead?

hire a TV mystery solver to try to unravel the picture's meaning.

The stepson is murdered in his room one night and the private detective accuses the wife of his murder, showing how it could have been done. He offers to keep quiet in return for the Pearl, which he now thinks he can find. Unfortunately the mystery solver has been there first and is now proudly wearing the Pearl on a ring. How do they get the Pearl away from him?

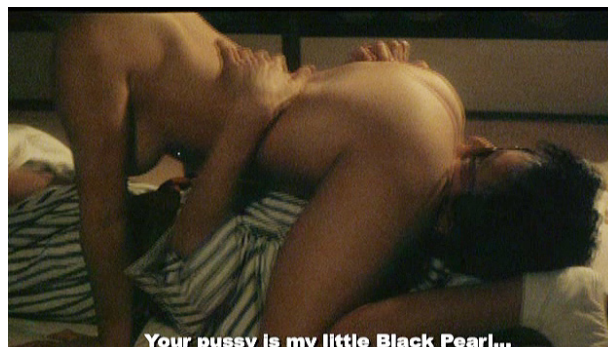
They devise a cunning plan based on his habit of fingering women on the Groper Train. Will it work? Can we stop laughing long enough to find out?

Search For The Black Pearl is not meant to be serious drama, surely? Still, it has some genuinely funny moments. The sex scenes are tasteful and the women are attractive and seem to be enjoying themselves. It's a silly, happy little romp and even if you aren't into this sort of fetish it's good for a laugh.

Web: <http://www.pinkeiga.com>



Taking a pussy picture



Lots of eroticism but not XXX

**The Hostess Also
Likes to Blow The
Horn
2009
Sinful Mermaid
R1 DVD**

This rather confused film is around forty years old. It is based on a German folk tale, was shot with a German soundtrack using German and Italian actors, then overdubbed by the Italians into English.

The story is fairly straightforward but contains all the elements for a good farcical comedy. It is post-Napoleonic Europe and bands of unemployed soldiers are terrorising the countryside. A pair of actors, Ferdinand and Justine, flee to the little country of Tursa which is supposed to be ore peaceful. Tursa, however, is now in the hands of an evil beer baron who has pretensions of royalty. He will achieve his wish by raising one million tulari to buy the title, and must also marry someone of royal blood. He must also show that he is improving the moral decency of the town. There is a chaste but impoverished Princess lined up and he is raising the money by taxing anything involving pleasure in Tursa – beer, sex, singing, anything to raise the money.

Not knowing this, Justine and Ferdinand buy the local inn (the previous owner went bankrupt from being overtaxed). They immediately fall foul of the local Decency Committee in the form of a spinster who likes to watch what's going on through her window. Fining people for sexual misconduct is another source of income. Justine and Ferdinand claim they are married to avoid being fined, but they can see that they must come up with a disguise for the inn if they are to recoup their money. The inn is remodelled as a monastery and convent where the townspeople may go to pray and "repent their sins". The penance sessions will get them into trouble if they are caught. The sign of a visit from the Police or



the Decency Committee will be Justine blowing a horn.

The would-be Count soon notices he is making no tax money from the one-time inn and investigates and Justine and Ferdinand are o the verge of being arrested.

There is also a true Count of Tursa wandering around (played by veteran Italian actor, Glenn Saxson). He decides he must take back his inheritance before the Baron officially becomes the new Count. There is a subplot involving the Princess being kidnapped and her place being taken by Justine, another involving Ferdinand being castrated for his sexual misdeeds and so on. There is a lot of gratuitous nudity, some near-rape scenes, and all the usual fornication you would expect of a bawdy folk tale.

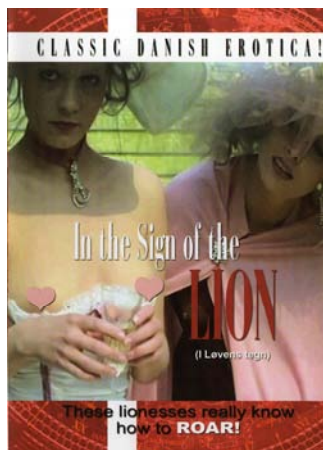
Of course it will all be sorted out in the end (and that takes a bit of doing). The baddies get their just desserts, the goodies get married or whatever, and the Rightful Heir is installed on the throne.

It's not great cinema but it is still funny enough. I sat all the way through it without any ill effects and got a good laugh every now and then. It's not as good as Jaws but certainly more entertaining than Picnic At Hanging Rock. Put the kids to bed then sit back and enjoy it.



In The Sign of The Lion (1976)
Happy Film
Smirk
MVD
R1 DVD

Another of Werner Hedman's stories for "In The Sign Of ..." series, this film features more slapstick and humour than erotica.



We start with two little old ladies who are trying to make a living writing romance novels. They get rejection after rejection, as romance novels are no longer in demand – the public wants something more spicy.

Challenged by the village postman to write an erotic novel, they go back to their experiences as housemaids in the local castle in their much younger days.

The Count was a lascivious old man but he was always good to his staff and we flash back to many of the moments that the old ladies remember fondly. The Count eventually dies but not before his housemaid, the ladies' older sister, delivers a child. The ladies have brought up the boy, Tony, as their nephew and he is now an engineer working overseas.

Their new erotic novel looks like being a success, but such novels are not written by little old ladies. They use their nephew's name and photo on the book as the writer, much to his surprise when he returns home unexpectedly. From here the farce mounts. The new Count



The Count

doesn't want his family name dragged through the mud and is convinced that the young man has written the book from a set of stolen diaries belonging to the old Count.

The book's publisher and a lady journalist won't believe that a man could have written the book and insist on meeting the true writer, who they are sure is a woman. Tony goes along with his aunts' wishes and we have the compulsory drag scene, revelations, etc as he falls in love with the journalist.

The Vice Squad is called in by the new Count to have the book declared pornographic and to have the author arrested for theft of the diaries, if indeed the true author can be found. In the end even the new Count's identity as the heir is called into question – his father liked to play a game with the ladies and his friends called "Whose Thing Is This" and there is some doubt about who may have really impregnated his mother. It's a piece of farce worthy of a *Carry On* plot but with more attractive women.

The Danes seemed to like their erotica with a good dose of comedy included.

This film is a great example.



A rather fun game called
Whose thing is this?



Drag, comedy and light sex

**In The Sign of
Taurus (1974)
Smirk
MVD
R0 DVD**

The Danes seem to have had a light-hearted attitude to their erotica and this film is no exception. It features better acting than most of the "In The Sign Of ..." series and a considerably better plot.

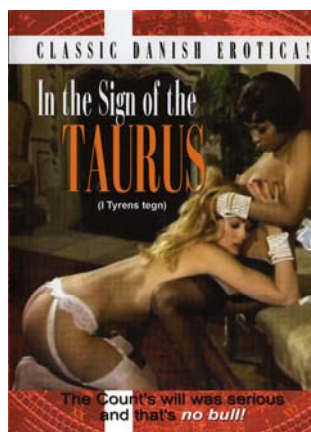
It was written by Werner Hedman who wrote many of the other "In The Sign Of " films.

The Count of the village dies from a heart attack. This is a tragedy because his generous donations to the village council meant the locals didn't have to pay any taxes. Although the Count was a decidedly dirty old man the villagers didn't seem to mind and tried to keep a high moral tone themselves.

That is, until the Count's will is read out. His money will go to the first child born out of wedlock in the sign of Taurus – that's about ten months away. If such a child is not born, the money goes to a cat shelter in Oslo.

This is a disaster for the straight-laced village. Their own children are, of course, virtuous (they think) so there is only one woman in the village who is suited – the local prostitute (sorry, needleworker).

The young people would like to get in on the act as well so the girls take lessons from the needleworker and the boys from the local man-about-town. Soon all the young people in the



village are going at it like rabbits. The parents feel it is necessary to put guards on their daughters but the young people still find ways around this.

Many girls are now pregnant and the couples would like to get married but this would defeat the terms of the will. The mayor puts a ban on future weddings until the first child is born out of wedlock.

One person who is particularly unhappy is the "needleworker". She is disgusted that the townspeople would prostitute their own daughters just so they don't have to pay taxes. She crashes a town council meeting and tells them off, calling them pimps. It turns out the only one she has not had relations with is the village priest, and in his younger days he managed to service the townswomen anyway.

The action is a little more risqué than other films in the series but it's all done in good taste and with an eye for the comedy rather than the smut, so in many ways it's more like a slightly dirtier version of Australia's Alvin Purple.

By today's standards it goes nowhere near pornographic. It's just a lot of fun with a lot of attractive girls. Sit back and enjoy it.



**Late Nite TV
R1 DVD
Adult Film Collection
Seduction Cinema**

This collection contains four films very loosely based on big-name films, with an emphasis on low-level lesbian sex. The plots aren't great, neither is the acting, but they are pleasant enough fun and there is plenty of titillation. They are well shot and the sound is good, but there are enough flaws to give you a bit of a laugh as well. Bag-pipe music as a background to a lesbian scene?

The films started out as very low-budget offerings on cable TV. Much of *Lord of the G-Strings*, for instance, looks like it was shot in someone's back garden. Look for the low stone retaining walls. As the early films started to make a good return there was more money to spend on later ones (although not in the costume department). Putting the films onto the new medium of DVD helped a lot.

Lord of the G-Strings

Supposedly a take on *Lord of the Rings*, but the plot of the original soon gets lost in the girl-girl action. One really nice thing about this film is that the girls look completely natural rather than the silicone-and-Botox plastic look of the mainstream porno films. Misty Mundaе is an attractive young girl and doesn't need the puffed-up harriдан look so prevalent now.



Two little Hobbits



Spiderbabe

If I have a major criticism of the film it's that there is rather too much girl-girl and after a while I got annoyed at watching the girls have all the fun. Apart from that it's pretty mild and if you're looking for pussy shots and penetration you will have to get your jollies elsewhere.

Spiderbabe

This one stars Misty Mundaе again in a take-off of guess-which-film. The acting isn't too bad but the plot, as usual is unimpressive.

Gladiator Eroticus

Oh, look ! There's Misty Mundaе again ! And the stone retaining walls ! The plot is a little better. I loved the fake-looking Roman ruins scattered around the countryside.

If only the girls wouldn't walk past them and show that the "ruins" are only a couple of me-



Gladiators



Superior 'Photoshopping' in Playmate of the Apes!

tres high. There's also what looks suspiciously like a statue of the Buddha lurking behind some trees. Surely if gladiators were still fighting there, the Coliseum wouldn't be in ruins?

Then again, I suppose you aren't watching these films as historical re-enactments, are you? We can probably let a few minor errors slip past – like the sunglasses on the Germans, the high heels on the gladiators' boots (that would be handy in the arena) and the lion wearing sneakers.

Playmates of the Apes

I thought at first this would be a take-off of *Planet Of The Apes*, but try as I might I don't remember Charlton Heston running around in a leopard-skin g-string doing lesbian scenes.

The usual actresses, the usual back garden, the usual everything. The only difference is that the plot is, if anything more farcical. Still, it's only a way to link lesbian scenes anyway. Thankfully they managed to keep the people in ape suits out of the girly scenes.

Extra

An interview with guess who, Mistie Mundae ! Well, it starts out as an interview but soon turns into reruns of scenes from the films and more girl – girl scenes with a friend.

The booklet enclosed with the two-DVD set is more informative, although not as attractive.

Nightmares Come at Night Media Blasters R1 DVD



Nightmares Come at Night is another dream like erotic horror from the director of *Vampyros Lesbos* (and some 150 other films), Jess Franco. Anne is a striptease artist working in a lower class establishment just making ends meet. At the establishments request she makes her dances last as long as possible so the patrons drink more. As she dances she notices a beautiful woman staring intently at her. She learns this woman's name is Cincia and that she is a well-respected erotic dancer.

Cincia begins to attend each night and the seduction begins. When Anne moves into Cincia's large mansion her every move is manipulated and controlled. It seems Cincia wants to dominate her body and soul.

As their relationship becomes more complicated, she is plagued with violent nightmares in which she commits cold blooded murders. The local psychiatrist, a committed catholic who seems to look on their relationship with some disapproval, seems to see these dreams as symptomatic of their destructive relationship. But is there more at play? Could these nightmares be real ? Is she a murderess or is she simply jealous of Cincia's provocative and reckless behaviour.

At the same time it seems that a sinister couple are lurking in an abandoned house next door and there is talk of a jewel heist, what is in store for Cincia and Anne?

Filled with nudity, steamy sexy senses and a truly psychedelic jazz score by Bruno Nicolai, this is one of the least known of Franco's films.

The acting is reasonable, indeed is a little better than usually found in most Franco productions and the plot is seductive even if the jewel heist sub plot takes away from the effectiveness of the main storyline.

Nightmares is not one of Franco's major films but it is strangely seductive and certainly worth seeing.

**Schoolgirl Report
Volume 3
Impulse Pictures
R1 DVD**

*German with English
subtitles*



This blatant piece of sexploitation is rather dated now, but in its time it was part of the wave of foreign films that loosened up the suppression of films that was done in the name of morality. This was particularly strong in the United States. Films like this would normally have been banned but since they purported to have an educational purpose – the film is subtitled “What Parents Find Unthinkable” - they managed to slip past the censors. They didn’t fool anyone, though. Although there was no sex as such, they had lots of teenage tits and bums and that’s what audiences wanted to see. As a result they were usually shown in the grindhouse theatres or in late-night sessions at the local drive-in.

Schoolgirl Report’s format is based around a series of interviews with “typical” sex-obsessed teenage schoolgirls. Each time a subject is raised a suitably educational reenactment is shown. Then there may be more interviews asking parents what they think about it. The reenactments are fairly harmless, including such lewd subjects as skinnydipping, underage sex, sex with older men, and so on. Just so we know this is serious, we also get school rape, sex with teachers, and a gunpoint rape scene that shows the consequences of staying out late at night.

“Once again a schoolgirl has been victimized” the voiceover says in a ponderous tone. “Once again we’re asking whose fault it is. But this



Skinnydipping



time we provide an answer. ...There’s a reasonable law to protect minors in public but the observance of this law relies on supervision – parental supervision – your supervision. Here, you share the blame.” OK, that should satisfy the censors.

The film finishes on a hopeful note of two young lovers who run foul of the girl’s rich father. They run away and finish up in bed together (naturally) and plan to take poison together (didn’t Shakespeare do something like this story?) but in the end they decide that their love can conquer all. Ah, lovely.

One thing that has aged well is the looks of the girls themselves. They have a fresh natural look that is so much at contrast with current ideas of film beauty that is all Botox and silicone. They must have been very poor, though, because none of them can afford a bra. We see this proven time after time. The miniskirts still look OK, too, although the young men in their flares and long hair really do set the vintage of the film.

Despite the disjointed plots and the thinly disguised titillation these films were well acted and produced. They were quite unashamed about giving the audience what they wanted and went a long way towards loosening the grip of the do-gooders on our morals.



Classic exploitation cinema

Sleazy Sci-Fi of the 1970s
Secret Key Motion Pictures (2010)
R1 DVD

Grindhouse was a genre of (mostly) cheaply produced films for the non-mainstream cinema market (or, in Australia, the late night drive-in shows). They usually had fairly low production values and costs and featured a higher amount of naked flesh than was necessary for the plot. In this collection we have three grindhouse films with a science fiction theme. Unusually one is German and is noticeably higher quality than its U.S. equivalents.



Invasion of the Bee Girls

In a research laboratory in a small town the compulsory evil scientist (female this time) is trying to turn women into the equivalent of queen bees. Since the purpose of the queen bee is to mate and produce offspring that's what her females do. Unfortunately at the moment of climax the men die. So many men dying with their pants around their ankles is bound to cause comment so an agent of the Dept of the Interior is sent to investigate. The film has an unbelievable plot, not much acting skill, but lots of semi-naked women to make up for it. The transfer from film to DVD is pretty poor, though, but viewable.

Dr Dildo's Secret

The Doctor is scared of real women after his rough treatment at their hands as a boy. Now he is making his own in his basement, using such incredible scientific advances as a clock and a



Saved from the Bee Girls



2069: A Sex Odyssey

tape recorder. He brings them to life through sex and seems to have created the perfect woman. Or has he? What happens when his secret gets out? Or when his female stock get loose?

2069: A Sex Odyssey

German, high budget (comparatively speaking), and although the title sounds like another well known SF film the only similarity is the name. An all-female planet is running out of sperm to reproduce. They have come to earth to collect some but they aren't quite sure how the whole process works – something about "rubbing the man's funnybone" they seem to recall. The plot is not particularly intelligent but is more than compensated by good photography, attractive women, a moderately funny script and a good transfer to DVD.

None of these films went anywhere near the quality of *Flesh Gordon*, which I have always regarded as the best of this type. Even so, this collection is a good example of the range of film available in this part of the grindhouse genre. The only extra is a selection of trailers from other grindhouse films.

Web: <http://www.alternativecinema.com>



Dr. Dildo in action

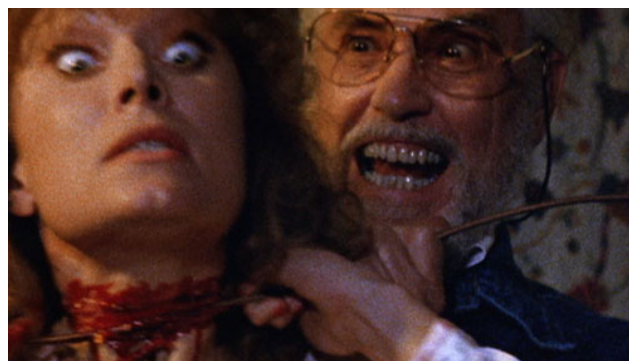
**Cat in the Brain (1990)
Grindhouse Releasing
R1 DVD**

Cat in the Brain aka Nightmare Concert is considered one of the rarest films by Lucio Fulci. It is one of his later films (he died in 1996) and represents Fulci at the twilight of his career. It is a film that Fulci horror fans ravenously seek as it has been cut to pieces in every country it was released and this has created a mystery about it. In Germany it was cut to 66 minutes, losing over 20 minutes of footage. Grindhouse Releasing has released the complete film in high definition and offers an uncensored director's cut which runs to 95 minutes.

This is a case where the gold at the end of the rainbow really is a chimera. Cat in the Brain is a great disappointment and most critics seem to agree. Gore and violence is fine when it serves a purpose and even gratuitous gore can, at times, work to that end. But in Cat in the Brain Fulci takes gore and makes it frustratingly boring. The film opens with the worst animatronic cat in cinema history eating some brains, this is how the protagonist supposed feels – I began to feel that way after a while too ! Soon gore scenes are hurled at us over and over again in such an excessive amount that it becomes boring, annoying and just plain stupid.

Dr. Lucio Fulci is a director of horror films, while he is directing a number of his films, *Ghosts of Sodom* and *A Touch of Death* (which are real Fulci films and real production scenes are used), he starts to go mad from making so many horror films.

He goes to see a psychiatrist who is pussy-whipped by his wife that he decides to hypnotize Fulci and use him as a front to commit brutal



A mad psychiatrist uses Fulci to cover his murderous rampage

murders. The plot sounds intriguing, maybe a bit of Giallo and there is lots of potential but the execution is just too extreme for words.

The problem with the film is with the constant and meaningless gore. Fulci looks at the microwave and we see a head decomposing in the microwave. He drops a glass and we then see a body on the floor oozing fluid. He goes to the bathroom and turns on a tap and we see someone drowned by a zombie. The scenes go on and on ad infinitum to the point they are annoying. Sure they are meant to represent flashbacks but these are continual gore or violent scenes simply piled on top of each other and do nothing to add to the film.

We may wonder if Fulci is actually sending up his audience. The film is about a film director who is going mad from making horror films. When the psychiatrist asks him why he doesn't make love films, he says they won't make money, his fans want horror. He then proceeds to make a story about himself making two of his own films and fills the film with recycled scenes and new gore and violence scenes which are so extreme they are unnecessary. It is as though he is saying you want horror; well here it is real horror !

I like Fulci, I thought his early Giallo films such as *Perversion Story* and *Lizard in a Woman's Skin* were superb and some of his later horror tales such as *The Beyond* were the epitome of enigmatic Italian horror. Cat in the Brain is one of those films which has been made significant by its rarity. Because it was censored, cut, banned and circulated by bootleg it became more important than it really is. It is a film which ultimately will only appeal to Fulci completists.

The release from Grindhouse, however, is impressive. A two DVD set with a high definition uncut edition. Rare interviews, trailers, art and stills and lots more. There is even a very impressive set of linear notes.



Gore overrides plot in Cat in the Brain

Demonic Toys Big Sky Video R4

Demonic Toys (1992) aka *Dangerous Toys* is another low budget cult horror from Full Moon. While it may have a very minute budget, it is amazing what can be achieved with a lot of creativity and inspiration.



The film opens with a police operation which goes horribly wrong. A married police team including a pregnant police woman and her partner have set up a gun running operation. The bust goes awry and the male partner is killed. One of the gun runners is wounded and they both run into an old toy warehouse. As he dies, his blood is spilt on the floor awakening an evil spirit which has been locked under the floor for over sixty years.

As it awakens it takes control of the toys within the warehouse and uses them to slaughter everyone who is locked inside. This includes the surviving gun-runner, the security guard, a chicken delivery man and a run-away girl. The goal of the spirit, however, is not to simply slaughter with abandon but to become reborn through the body of the policewomen since his attempt to achieve incarnation into the physical world some sixty years ago failed.

The toys are the real success of the film and have been clearly influenced by the development of the Puppet Master series. While the characters of the toys are not quite as well developed as in other Full Moon productions they are still pretty good. There is a teddy bear with very sharp teeth which eats human flesh, a very nasty clown puppet with a lolly pop, a vicious baby doll and a robot who shoots lasers. The scene where the teddy bear grows to full size is especially cool.

While the acting is average, as would be expected from a low budget film, the plot is reasonable and there are some above average set-pieces. I especially thought the dream sequences and the flashback to the demons last attempt at incarnation is impressive. Placing the story within an abandoned factory filled with boxes and old toys creates a suspenseful mood and on the whole *Demonic Toys* ends up as a successful and creative horror tale.

Dorian Gray Roadshow Entertainment R4 DVD



Oscar Wilde's novel *Dorian Gray* caused undue consternation in Victorian Britain but has since become one of the great classic gothic novels combining great wit, decadence and a supernatural theme.

Set in an impressively re-created 19th century, director Oliver Parker's film sustains the original gothic feel of the tale but with a more explicit exploration of sexuality and decadence. The tale centres on young Dorian, a powerless and pained youth who was degraded and abused in his childhood by his overpowering grandfather.

On his grandfather's demise, he becomes heir to the estate but is somewhat overwhelmed by the society he must now enter. He is taken under the wing of homosexual artist Basil Hallward (Ben Chaplin) and hedonist Lord Henry Wotton (Colin Firth), who is portrayed as a cross between Lord Byron and Oscar Wilde.

Hallward paints an incredibly realistic painting of Dorian's beauty and youth which is hailed by all as a masterpiece. Under the wayward influence of Wotton, Dorian becomes enraptured by the painting and offers his soul in exchange for immortality.

It seems someone was listening because Dorian soon finds that wounds inflicted on his person are transferred to the painting and while others age, he sustains his youth forever.

At first he falls in love with a Sybil Vane (Rachel



Lord Wotton and Dorian Gray



Dorian Gray

Hurd-Wood) but this just will not do within the upper echelons of Victorian England and Wotton introduces Dorian to the wild life of prostitutes, opium, hashish and orgies to ween him off her. He breaks off their engagement leading to Sybil's suicide. Soon he follows every possible urge indulging in every possible vice, leading to him killing his friend Hallward and corrupting all around him. Of course as this is a morality tale, these experiences all lead him execrably towards facing the darkness of his soul and his destruction (and possible redemption).

Dorian Gray is an intriguing adaptation of a well-respected gothic novel. Firth as Wotton is utterly superb; witty, cynical and urbane, he is the arch sceptic. Ben Barnes as Dorian is both beautiful and seductive; he combines both innocence and a sense of the sinister. Ben Chaplin as Hallward, a homosexual artist trying to survive in Victorian England plays a good supporting role.

The problem with Dorian Gray is that it is essentially an antiquated morality tale. The warnings against hedonism and indulgence quickly wear thin and the more indulgent aspects of the movie are by far the most enjoyable. Personally I have always felt the novel reflected Wilde's own inner torment over his own homosexuality and admiration for pleasure. On one level he rejected traditional morality and celebrated cynicism with great repartee and banter, yet on another he hated himself internalizing the prudish values of Victorian England. This conflict is at the heart of any adaptation of Dorian Gray and hence automatically dates the plot regardless of how well the story is told or the characters fleshed out.

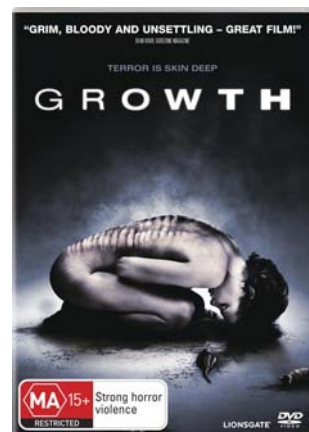
This is an enjoyable rendering of the tale but ultimately relies on notions most of us now find rather quaint and antiquated.

Growth Sony R4 DVD

In the late Eighties a scientific team located on Cuttyhunk Island began experimentation with parasites. The team encoded them with new gene sequences to achieve novel ends. Their first major success was the creation of a perfect pearl which made the institute immediately very rich. With new found funds they moved to a more contentious goal, the creation of a new form of human. The idea was to imprint the parasites with information which would re-encode DNA increasing both physical and mental strength. The results were highly successful creating a new level of human evolution.

However, the team had overlooked a simple detail, parasites have to feed. As the parasites multiplied they took over the body and mind of the subjects turning them into insane killers. The parasites adapted quickly being able to move from body to body and even survive as independent creatures. They spent throughout the community killing over three quarters of the island inhabitants. This was over twenty years ago and Jamie fled the outbreak hoping never to return. She left behind painful family memories including the death of her mother.

In the present she receives a letter advising her father has died and that the institute has been left to her. Believing it to be worth a cool two million, she returns with her boyfriend, her immunity challenged step brother and a close



Another mad scientist, this time with genetically modified parasites



Justin uses his new found strength to get laid and teach the locals a lesson

friend to prepare the property for sale.

When they arrive the town's people seem strangely insular and Jamie finds that the property cannot be sold, only signed over to the island council for a \$75,000 dividend.

Before she can decide what to do. Justin has been doing the wild thing down by the lake and becomes ill. Strangely he seemingly returns to health but with improved stamina and awareness. He begins to behave irately and the infection begins to spread.

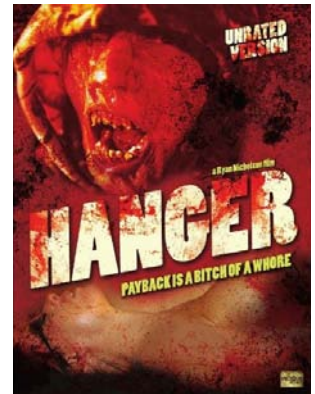
It becomes clear that the Island hides a terrible secret which has been kept hidden from the public. Mason, who she believed dead, is still running his research and she much now struggle to survive against all odds.

Growth is an impressive low budget science fiction tale directed by Gabriel Cowan who was the co-director of the 2008 horror film *Breathing Room*. *Growth* is surprising on so many levels. On what is clearly a limited budget compared to mainstream Hollywood films, Cowan has created a film which is filled with suspense, tension and excitement. It has an intelligent plot, solid character development and special effects are highly successful. The parasites/bugs are especially gooey and have a real squish factor.

The plot does have the a traditional mad scientist plot but it has been adapted in such a way that it is novel and innovative.

The electronic score is excellent creating a constant uneasiness and the film constantly surprises. This is a prime example of what a true indie film can be, it is a must see for science fiction and horror fans.

**Hanger
Vicious Circle
Films
Breaking Glass
Pictures
R1 DVD**

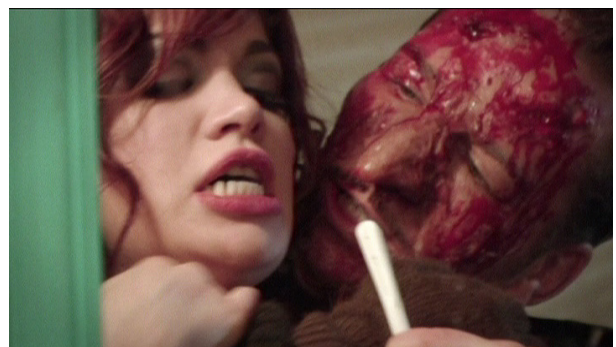


This nasty little film is in the Grindhouse tradition of lurid plot, lots of gore and some sexy women. Unfortunately the lightweight plot rather lets down what could have been a good film, so let's look at that first.

Leroy is a pimp. He is violent and sadistic with it, so when one of his girls, Rose, gets pregnant he aborts the baby with a wire coat hanger. The mother dies. The foetus survives and is found by an old street tramp who "adopts" the baby and raises the child as his own. The boy is now eighteen, reclusive and slightly retarded. He is terribly scarred and deformed from the coat hanger abortion.

An ex-naval man, known mostly as "The John", believes he is the boy's father. He was becoming close to Rose and has decided that Leroy must pay for killing her. First he gets his son set up in a job in the local recycling works where he is quite at home with the strange people who work there. The others soon become his friends.

Leroy is aware that he is being hunted and captures and tortures the John. He leaves the John for dead in a dumpster, which is a bad mistake. The John escapes and arms himself and goes looking for Leroy. In a confrontation both shoot each other down. The John is killed but Leroy is still alive and threatening revenge on the kid and all associated with him. There is



Realistic and confronting violence



Strange and bizarre characters

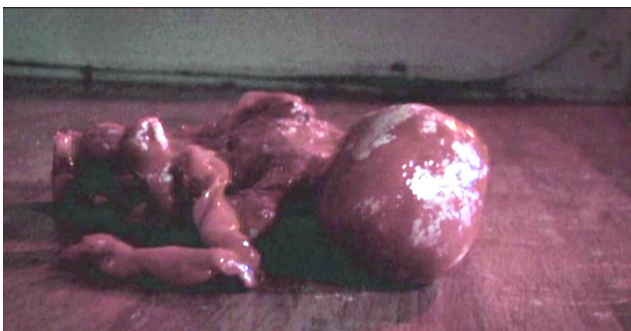
only one way this can end. The kid smashes his head in with a shovel then stamps on his head until he is just a flattened pulpy mess.

Even this pretty basic plot does the film a little more credit than it justifies. It is padded out with the compulsory naked women shots, homosexual rape, torture and so on that you would expect of a film of this type, but the plot still seems a bit thin and has some gaping holes in it.

The acting, however, is mostly good and many of the characters are well depicted if a little strange. The makeup is spectacular and the gore scenes verge on gross, so you will get all the blood you could want

The film was written and directed by Ryan Nicholson, who previously made *Gutterballs*. The comparisons are going to be made, so I must say that I thought *Gutterballs* had the better plot but *Hanger* had more sleazy violence. It's a case of whichever turns you on. There are the usual extras – "The Making Of...", a commentary by Lloyd Kaufman of Troma Films who appears in this film as a transvestite prostitute, bloopers, deleted scenes, and a blue movie called "Black on White Inbred".

Overall *Hanger* is a good film of its style, let down just a little by a plot that could have been explored better.



A very messy abortion

Horrors of War Director's Cut Sonnyboo / ArbourAve.Films R1 DVD



A group of soldiers working their way carefully through the French woods after D-Day are attacked by strange but deadly human-like creatures. They are fast, savage and very powerful. They are also very hard to kill. Most of the squad dies but Lt. Schmidt's report isn't believed. He is accused of getting his squad killed in a German ambush due to bad judgment and transferred to a punishment squad that seems to be given the suicide missions behind enemy lines.

When he returns from another mission that was also attacked, he finds other reports have come in about the creatures. He is now taken seriously and is given the job of kidnapping a German scientist who is believed to be behind this new weapon of Hitler's. The weapon is now acknowledged to be a troop of werewolves and zombies, converted from local Frenchmen who were captured. There also appears to be a number of German soldiers who have been converted to zombies. He is given a lycanthrope soldier of his own and he will need him to combat these super warriors.

For a werewolf movie, a genre that has almost disappeared, this one is extremely well done. For a start much of the action takes place in daylight so for a change we can see who's doing what to whom. Much of the action is outdoors which often gives a film a rather budget look, but here it is in context and works.

The effects and makeup are good without being overpowering, and for an independent film even the actors are surprisingly good at their craft if a little rough in places. The movie was shot on film which may explain the excellent picture quality. Some stock footage is used but even that has been integrated well.

The film has been compared to the old B grade Grindhouse films but I think it deserves better than that. I would instead compare it with a film like *30 Days of Night* that also did good work within the genre. It's a good edge-of-the-seat film and I recommend it.

The Killing Room (2009)
Beyond H.E.
R4 DVD



Ms Reilly (Chloe Sevigny) is a psychologist interviewing for a job with a highly secret government operation. As part of the test she is to watch video of a test run on four unsuspecting people who think they are doing a survey. There are some ominous signs, though. The furniture is bolted to the floor and they are being watched through a darkened window high up on the wall. It starts out innocently enough and the head of the project, Dr Phillips, enters the room to outline the project to them. As he leaves he shoots one and the “survey” suddenly turns nasty.

Ms Reilly now watches the rest of the experiment live from a control room behind the window. Although she has been assessed by a supervisor as “ruthless”, even she is horrified by what happens. One by one the survivors are killed during a series of tests. They are steered by a range of stimuli and questions. Cooperation doesn’t seem to help here. It soon becomes obvious that there will be only one left alive at the end of the tests, but what for? Any attempt to escape is punished. At the end of each session someone dies whether killed by the survivors or not. Dr Phillips tells Reilly that they can now complete the test in hours rather than days, but they need her psychological skills to refine the tests even further.

She is reminded of a secret mind-control operation dating back almost twenty years that was aimed at producing human killing machines. It was banned by successive Presidents and its very existence could not be proven after documents were destroyed. Can she do anything to stop the killings?

The film is brilliantly constructed. Following each killing there is a quieter moment before the next test begins, but the level of suspense increases each time. Not knowing what the purpose of the tests is only heightens the suspense and not knowing who will die next (or why) doesn’t help. Most of the film takes place in the sterile white room decorated only with the bodies and bloodstains and so we are able to concentrate of the victims and their reactions. The bodies are a constant reminder to them that this is for real. If you can handle constant terror and the occasional moment of sheer horror, this is a well-acted and well-executed film. The “evil govern-

ment department” has been done many times before, but I haven’t seen it done this well. And we do find out at the end what it’s all about, but that is horrifying as well.

Melvin
531 Productions (2009)
R1 DVD



Three years ago a young nerdy student, Melvin, was bullied by a group of local thugs. The bullying got out of hand and Melvin was accidentally killed. He wants revenge.

Norton Pincus is the gang’s current target. He is another nerdy type, but one night while walking through the cemetery Melvin rises from the undead and confronts Norton and tells Norton he has chosen him “to set things right”. He bites Norton and Norton becomes a night-time zombie. During the day Norton is still the nerdy mild-mannered student, the butt of everyone’s jokes, but at night with Melvin in control of his body he seeks revenge on Melvin’s killers and his own tormentors. His revenge is, naturally, bloody and savage and utterly predictable.

This independent film is a kind I would usually avoid. Every independent producer seems to think they have a zombie horror film that’s worth making, and they usually make it look like a real amateur-hour production. This film has every cliché in the book, the decapitations, the buckets of blood, the conventional characters, power tools and so on, but it’s done really well and with a certain level of dark humour that makes it all work. Perhaps it’s because of its sheer conventionality that it succeeds – it is almost a parody of itself.

It is short at 64 minutes and this means that the scenes have been tightly edited and well produced, and you don’t get any one scene long enough to get bored. Melvin is a lot of fun – why not give it a try?



Mum and Dad
Anchor Bay
Entertainment
Starz
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
 Debra Wilkinson

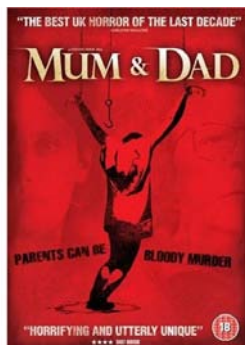
This is a nasty little film. Rather than build up gently to the main theme we are dropped into it rather quickly. When Lena misses her bus late one night Birdy offers her a bed for the night. She meets Birdy's mum and dad in an unexpected way. Dad is bashing a girl's head in with a hammer. Mum explains that he gets a bit agitated sometimes.

Lena is chained up and she discovers Mum's sadistic hobby of carving patterns into peoples skins. Lena soon realizes that she must play along with their deadly games and appear to become part of the family if she is to survive. Her main job apart from housekeeping is sorting through the stolen luggage that Dad brings home from the Heathrow baggage handling facility where he works. Lena, Birdy and their "brother" (another victim) are expected to support the family as well by minor shoplifting and theft. With the threat of Dad and his hammer hanging over them they must fit into the lifestyle or die. Birdy and her "brother" have been brainwashed and brutalised long enough that they now accept this lifestyle, but Lena must appear to fit in while keeping her feelings to herself.

This works for a while until she is trusted enough that she manages to escape. Now it's time for revenge, and it will be as bloody as Mum and Dad's own habits.



Getting Dad annoyed can be fatal



The most dangerous parents you could ever have

The film is not particularly well acted because the writer did not give the characters much development and the actors don't have much to work with. Particularly with Mum and Dad, they just appear on the scene fully developed. Why did they become homicidal maniacs? How have they got away with it for so long? The moody atmosphere of the sets, the poor lighting and dingy rooms, suits the film's theme.

This is a film for those with strong stomachs and gore fans will love it. I would have liked it more had the plot been developed better, but it is certainly going to stick in my memory.

Editor's Note

Mum and Dad is certainly a strange film, some have argued it is some sort of commentary on the dangers of extreme family values. It has a strong patriarchal father figure who rules the family with a rod of iron and strong if not disturbed religious attitudes. It is a favourite with the cult horror crowd as it is such an extreme film, presented in such a way that you must think hard to decode to its message.

Nothing is given by the way of storyline and you must work out the message (if there is one) for yourself. Some has seen Mum and Dad as yet another example of the modern trend towards extreme meaningless violence in film, while others have held it up as new blood in an old genre. Whatever you think, it is a controversial film and worth seeing - if only to make up your own mind.

BTW: Welcome Debra to our review team !

**Pandorum
Anchor Bay
R1 DVD**

Pandorum is an intriguing and original science fiction horror film. It brings together a range of themes and plays with its audience not allowing the viewer to gain a complete picture of what has occurred to the crew of the ship Elysium right to the very end. You are never sure who can be trusted and the suspense is sustained right through the nearly two hours of the film.



Two astronauts, Bower (Ben Foster) and Payton (Dennis Quaid), wake up from an extended period of suspended animation to find themselves alone with no memory of who they are or their mission. As Bower begins to search the ship to find traces of its supposed 60,000 passenger cargo, he begins to have flashes of memory and realizes he is the ship's technical office and a member of crew five. Both astronauts also seem to have recollections about Pandorum, a mental condition brought on by extended periods of suspended animation which can cause severe paranoia, hallucinations and violent behaviour. The fact that you are not quite sure what are real problems on-board Elysium and what are symptoms of Pandorum adds to the suspense of the film and gives it an extra edge.

Bower soon realizes that the ship's nuclear reactor is behaving in an irregular manner and works his way towards it. However this is not as easy as it seems as he finds himself stalked by deformed humanoid like creatures which seem to have super human strength. These mutants are also cannibalistic and seem to have infested the ship. As he encounters other survivors they bat-



Genetically engineered mutants



Battling their way to the Reactor

tle their way to the reactor and the terrible tale of the Elysium becomes known.

Planet Earth, suffering from massive overpopulation and resource deprivation dispatched the ship and its crew with a genetic library of earth animal and vegetable species on a 100 year plus voyage to a Earth-like planet known as Tanis. Sometime into the journey they receive a message that the Earth is in the midst of some sort of disaster and then realize that the earth is no more. One of the flight crew goes insane from the news developing Pandorum, he kills the other two crew members and decides to transform the rest of the crew for his own entertainment. He manipulates the genetic feeds to the crew members who are in suspended animation and then unleashes them to do battle with each other. We now know the terrible origins of the creatures on board. The story continued with some fascinating and unexpected developments and certainly is one of the more intelligent sci fi horror films of recent times.

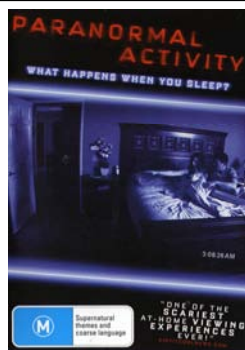
Pandorum brings together a range of science fiction and horror concepts in a film which is beautiful made with excellent special effects. The creatures, while a significant aspect of the film, are not overplayed and the character development of all the major figures in the film is solid.

While Dennis Quaid has certainly had his share of movie flops in recent years, he is excellent in his role on Payton and Ben Foster as Bower is nothing short of superb.

The plot is innovative with lots of unusual twists and turns, it will certainly keep you on the edge of your seat to the very end and is highly recommended.

Paranormal Activity Icon Home Entertainment R4 DVD

This film plays with your mind in a big way. Much is implied, little is shown. Your imagination fills the gaps and as the plot develops it goes into overdrive.



The story is simple enough. Micah and Katie have an uninvited guest in their home – the sort that goes “bump in the night”. Katie tells Micah that it has followed her through a number of different addresses since she was a little girl and although it can be scary (such as when she wakes up in the middle of the night and sees ... something at the foot of the bed watching her), it doesn't seem to be actually malignant. She is still worried about it so Micah gets a video camera to record what goes on at night and hopefully find out what is haunting them.

This disturbs the night guest and the activity increases, becoming noisier and more obvious. Katie is now really nervous. She calls a Dr Fredericks, an expert in ghosts and paranormal activity, but he has not experienced this sort of activity before. He knows a doctor who has, but they do not call him at once. Micah still thinks he needs some rational evidence. Dr Fredericks has also told them that he thinks they are being haunted by a demon, not a ghost. Demons are more dangerous if antagonised.

Michael is building up a library of the poltergeist-like activity on film, and now they start hearing what could be voices as well – is it trying to communicate with them? Katie is becoming increasingly irrational but Micah keeps blundering along accidentally antagonising the demon further. A ouija board seems to spell out a message but is then destroyed in flames. His requests for the demon to speak English don't help. Meanwhile the demon's earthly powers seem to be growing stronger. It can now turn lights on and off and open doors.

Micah scatters talcum powder on the floor one night and they see odd three-toed footprints in the powder after a visit. Micah follows the footprints and examines the roof space where he finds part of an old photo of Katie as a child. Is the demon obsessed with her and sees Micah as a competitor?

It seems so, because a photo of the couple is



The horror slowly builds to a very successful conclusion.

attacked. Micah's face in the photo is scratched from inside the glass and the glass is then broken as if his image has been punched in the face.

Dr Fredericks returns to the house but he is driven off in fear by the now out-of-control demon. Until his colleague returns Micah and Katie are alone with their demon and it is not happy.

It is easy to pick holes in the plot along the lines of “why didn't they just ...?” but the sheer feeling of terror being built up in Micah and Katie seems to be blocking rational thought. Perhaps the factor that contributes most to the constant buildup of tension is that they never get to see the demon. We all wait for it, even want it to appear, but apart from occasional shadows it stays elusive. How do you handle being hunted by something when you don't even know what it looks like?

The constant slow but steady rise in terror is what makes this film. You just can't predict where it is going but you know in the end there will be a confrontation.

The film is rather low budget. Most of it is shot from the point of view of Micah's hand held camera and this sometimes becomes annoying. The bulk of the action takes place in a couple of rooms, most notably the bedroom where the activity seems to be concentrated.

The superbly developed plot and great acting lift it out of the low budget genre and make it a truly frightening film. It's the best of its style that I have seen for many years.

Thirst
Madman
R4 DVD

Thirst is an unusual character driven vampire first by Korean director Park Chan-wook, best known for Old Boy. It is a psycho-sexual love story, filled with angst, suppression and desire and a vampire tale told in a new post-modern sort of way.



Sang-hyun is a devoted priest; he sees too many of his patients dying and decides to commit his body and mind to an experimental laboratory working with leprosy patients. Its unorthodox approach is not sanctioned by the Vatican but his compassion overrides his obedience. He is infected with the leprosy virus and when the vaccine fails he begins to die. He is given a blood transfusion in a last ditch attempt to save his life and after a period of no bodily response, suddenly returns to the land of the living. There is a hitch, he is now a vampire. The only way to keep the virus at bay is to drink fresh human blood at regular intervals. If he does not have a regular dose of blood, he becomes crippled with pain and covered in leprosy sores.

Sang-hyun tries to keep to his vows and drinks the blood of dying patients and then the blood of patients who wish to commit suicide. However the vampire blood also inflames his passions and he begins having a difficult time keeping his vows.



Make me a vampire...

During a game of Mah-jong he meets Tae-ju, a beautiful young woman he once knew during his youth growing up in an orphanage. Her adopted family is abusive and she lives in near slavery. She is married to a near idiot who has no thought for her needs or desires.

As Sang-hyun becomes more aware of Tae-ju's plight, their motivations become unclear. Is Sang-hyun's attraction born out of his compassion or his lust for sex and blood? Is Tae-ju the innocent she seems or is she manipulating Sang-hyun's obviously naive affection to gain a better life? Their interactions are the nexus of this fascinating film.

These complex issues become more significant as they begin a passionate relationship (initiated by Tae-ju), which finally results in the death of her husband. This results in a quirky sequence where it is hard to tell whether they are haunted by her husband's ghost, their own guilt or worse, he is still somehow alive. As the story continues, their conflict results in Tae-ju's death and Sang-hyun making her a vampire.

While Sang-hyun tries to avoid killing, Tae-ju revels in it. She has been downtrodden throughout her life and now sees a way to get revenge on the world she despises. While Sang-hyun sees himself as some sort of mutated human, trying to use his new found powers in a compassionate way, Tae-ju sees herself in a role similar to a fox and a chicken; she hunts and kills with abandon.

As both of their characters disintegrate under the effects of the vampire blood, and when three of their friends are slaughtered by Tae-ju, Sang-hyun makes a decision which will confront and surprise.

Thirst possesses a depth not often found in vampire films. It explores a range of themes using the core tale of a priest who in searching for a compassionate means to end suffering becomes a blood drinking killer. At the same time this is a film which could have easily become too heavy, yet Park Chan-wook has imbued it with a dark, if at times bleak, sense of humour which strikes the right balance and makes it a very unusual vampire tale.

Considering just how many vampire films are made, this is a very different from any you have seen before and startle, amuse and maybe even get you thinking.

Twilight New Moon
Sony Pictures
(2010)
DVD and Blu-Ray
Various Release

This is the second film in the Twilight Saga series of four books. At the same time it can be enjoyed without seeing the first film and is satisfying in its own right.



It is set in what looks like the wild and beautiful northwest coast of North America. Bella has fallen in love with a young local lad, Edward Cullen.

Edward has a problem that prevents him from taking the romance any further – he is a vampire. So are all his family. Bella has discovered this and finds she loves Edward anyway, but Edward's family must move to another area. People have started to notice that they aren't growing any older. Bella is devastated. She would happily become "changed" herself to stay with Edward, but he insists that she remain mortal and live a real life.

Although she still misses Edward, Bella eventually forms an attachment with Jacob, a youth from the local Indian tribe who is surprisingly strong for his age. The tribe has its own secret. At a particular time in their life the young males turn into werewolves, hated enemies of the vampires.

They have a treaty with the vampires that has



Gotta love those werewolves



Romantic angst vampire style

been honoured so far by both sides, but there is an ominous mention in the film of another monster that the wolves must guard the local people from. This is left to develop in a later film.

There is internal warfare between the vampire families. Edward has killed the wife of one of the other families and they have decided to have Bella killed in retaliation. Both Edward and Jacob are trying to protect her but they will still fight each other over her. Finally all three must make hard choices and accept the results.

Director Chris Weitz (Golden Compass) has made a magnificent film that places vampires and werewolves in a different but quite suitable context. The lonely forests are a perfect backdrop for the great wolves, and the vampires of the Cullen family have none of the stereotype characteristics of past vampire films. By contrast the meeting of the council of vampires in an old church-like building looks rather out-of-place.

The special effects, especially the wolves, are nothing short of brilliant. The fight scenes are lightning-fast and well detailed and as a result are quite believable. The only negative I could see is that Robert Pattinson, playing Edward, looks rather effeminate in his vampire makeup. Nevertheless he is a good actor and plays his part with conviction. Unfortunately he leaves the storyline for most of its length so he doesn't have much of a part to work with.

It is a really well made, entertaining film full of action and drama and I look forward to the rest of the series.

XII and Dark Ride Icon Home Entertainment Blu Ray

XII

XII is an effective slasher/horror title even though it is only 89 minutes in length. After being convicted sent to prison for the sexual abuse of children, a criminal is facially disfigured by other prisoners in an especially brutal manner.

When released, he decides to take revenge on the twelve members of the jury which convicted him. His plan is to despatch each in the most brutal manner possible making them experience the pain he experienced in jail. It certainly doesn't seem he was rehabilitated by his time inside!

While this certainly is a fairly superficial plot, it is well used to bring out a real sense of dread and sustains the suspense (and horror) throughout.

The depiction of a small isolated country town whose sheriff is out of his depth is excellent and the killer with his leatherface like mask is suitably horrifying. You never really get to engage with the killer or see him as anything more than a murderous raging monster and this makes him even more terrifying.

This is a violent and gore ridden film which certainly packs in the action and horror.

Dark Ride

Dark Ride harkens back to the Slasher films of the Eighties, it has lots of gore, nudity and as many scares as it can pack in. Using a ghost ride as the background to the major horror section of the film allows the film-makers to create a textured background filled to the brim with classic images of horror and violence as well as provided a vast number of wrong turns, jumps, starts and "fake scares".

The plot is suitably bizarre. A family runs a ghost attraction at a local amusement park called the "Dark Ride", the younger child is seemingly normal, while the older, Jonah is deformed and has the mental age of a young child but the oversized body of a strong adult, he



Dark Ride: Headsplitting Horror

lives imprisoned in the basement of the ride.

He kills and mutilates two young girls using their bodies to create new attractions, "Jonah see, Jonah do". He is locked in a mental asylum.

This brings the film to the present where a group of rather unlikeable college students decide to take a road trip. Along the way one of them "finds" a brochure on the ride and they decide to give it a look. Earlier Jonah has escaped from the asylum after been taunted with a steak (!) and the smell of blood sends him into a fury, killing the guards he makes for the Dark Ride.

Of course as Jonah and the students collide bloody mayhem erupts, there are some nice twists and turns and an especially nice ending with the unveiling of one of the group as Jonah's younger brother.

The guts and gore factor is high with some superbly done special effects (I especially like the head splitting of the security guard) and a good balance of violence and suspense.

Is *Dark Ride* a success? Well, I am unsure. While it has a lot of pluses with some great suspense sequences, the characters are unlikeable and the build-up to the action at the Dark Ride takes way too long. Except for the interlude at the asylum, the set-up of the road trip seems to continue forever especially with a group of rather bland and irritating characters.

That being said the use of a carnival type background gives this film a great texture and mood and it certainly is superior when it comes to many other "teen" horror films on the market. The acting is reasonable and while the characters are not especially endearing, once you get through the build-up and into the *Dark Ride* it is worth the wait

Zombieland
Sony Pictures 2010
R4 DVD

Just when I thought I had seen more than enough of zombies, along comes this wonderful film and revives my interest. The film starts out well and just gets better, turning into a love story with lots of zombies. Zombies are shot, run over, beheaded with garden shears ("Just gonna take a little off the top"), and even bashed to death with a banjo. It's a very satisfying movie for the blood-and-guts brigade.

"It's amazing how quickly things can go from bad to total shitstorm"

As usual, a virus (or something) in an infected hamburger has turned the United States into a nation of rampant hungry flesh-eaters. There are few normal survivors but we follow the life of one of them, nicknamed Columbus (Jesse Eisenberg). He is a nerdy student type and is facing another weekend in his flat in front of the computer. His first experience of the zombie plague is when an attractive young female neighbour knocks at his door looking for refuge from a sick-looking man who tried to bite her. Columbus thinks his dreams are coming true but it all goes wrong. She has been bitten and soon turns into a zombie. "The first time I let a girl into my life and she tries to eat me". He bashes her to death with the lid of his toilet cistern, as you do. From here his experiences lead him to formulate a set of rules to stay alive in zombie country.

"Rule No. 1 – Cardio. The first ones to go for obvious reasons were the fatties"

He learns the importance of always checking what may be lurking in the back seat of his car. Wear your seat belt. "Double-tap" a zombie – one shot may not be enough, so always kill them twice to avoid pronouncing them dead prematurely. Most importantly, "Don't let them catch you with your pants down. Avoid bathrooms."

As a tentative plan he decides to head home to Ohio where his parents may still be alive. Along the way he meets Tallahassee (Woody Harrelson) whose main aim in life is the find the last Twinkies in the U.S. that haven't passed their



The Fatties go first

use-by date. He is a skilled brawler who hates zombies and specializes in finding new savage ways to kill them. Such as the garden shears. The unlikely pair find themselves heading in the same direction. During their travels they come across Wichita and Little Rock, a teenage girl and her twelve year old sister. Wichita steals the mens' car and guns. Their paths cross again and they finally join forces. The girls hope to get to an amusement park outside Los Angeles that is supposed to be free of zombies. It isn't.

The four finally realize that they are as close as they are going to get to being a family – not exactly the traditional happy, god-fearing family unit of other apocalypse films, but a suitable family for survival in Zombieland.

There is even a guest appearance by Bill Murray, playing himself (briefly) and paying tribute to Ghostbusters.

This film will be compared with the British "Shaun of the Dead" and it acquits itself well. I wouldn't say either film is the better – it is just two approaches to the same subject. Acting is great, the plot is tight and not just blood and gore, and the two lead actors particularly develop stereotyped but well-crafted characters. The comedy keeps popping up in the most unlikely places.

Zombieland 2 is rumoured to come out in 2011.



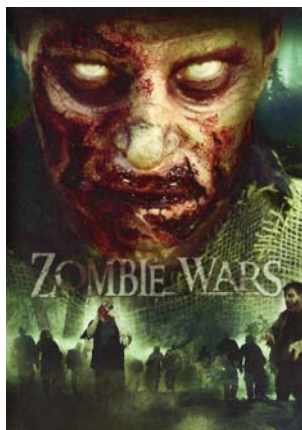
Zombie Wars
All American
Pictures (2008)
R1 DVD

This film goes back a few years to a time when every director thought they could make a low-budget zombie film.

By last year I was zombied out and this one slipped by. I didn't miss that much. It's a fairly formula zombie film that is saved from complete anonymity by having some original ideas.

The planet has, as usual, been infected by something that has turned most people into zombies. Most of these are the traditional shambling, speechless, arms-out-in-front-of-you zombies but some have evolved a little. They have a rudimentary intelligence and a hierarchy of sorts and have decided that growing their own food (humans) holds the key to the future. The surviving humans are reduced to small nomadic paramilitary groups.

One such group is in an area where the zombies have established a meat farm. One of their group is captured so they plot a rescue mission. While in captivity the "soldier" notices some oddities about the camp. The zombies have things that they could not possibly have made themselves (like soap) so they must be trading with humans nearby. He is rescued and passes his information on to his group's leader. She decides the farm must be wiped out and calls on other groups like hers for help. Only one turns up. This is enough to burn the farm to the ground and free the zombies, and she finds that the local town and a number of other paramili-



More Zombies

tary groups are behind the trade with the zombies.

The group crashes a meeting between the leaders of the town and other paramilitary groups. The leader is horrified to learn that they all know what's going on at the farm but have reached an understanding with the zombies that they can continue their disgusting meat farming as long as they leave the town alone. She shoots the leader and threatens retribution on the rest, thereby making this part of the world just a little bit safer for the living.

The story could have been so much better but it is left undeveloped. Instead there is the usual concentration on zombies killing and being killed. I have often wondered how long zombies would last in the face of a trained group with automatic weapons, but I saw that in *Lost Platoon* (coincidentally by the same producer). Zombies evolving intelligence and speech is a new idea that could have led to a better film, but once again it is not really developed. The film, in spite of these more interesting features, remains doggedly B grade. If you feel the need to watch a zombie film this one is OK, but I am disappointed that it could have been so much better.



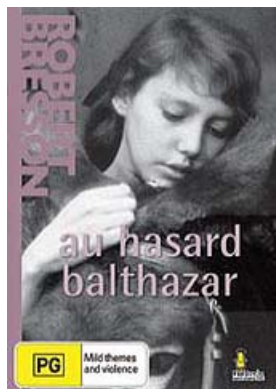
Lots of B Grade guts and gore



Zombies attack

Au Hasard Balthazar
(1966)
Umbrella
Entertainment
R4 DVD

B & W
French with English
subtitles



Critics have gone into orgasms of analysis over this film, but leaving aside that it was made by legendary French director Robert Bresson, what is it really like? After all, we watch films for entertainment.

The film follows the life of a young girl growing up in a rather brutal French farming town. It is paralleled by the life of a donkey, Balthazar, that she christened as a child. Marie, the rather attractive but passive girl, is treated with a certain contempt by the villagers.

She seems to have no control over her own life. She eventually seeks comfort with Gerard, a local delinquent who heads a small gang of petty thugs who are destined to become gangsters.

She is treated with utter contempt by Gerard, and the villagers feel the same way about her for hanging around with him. In his few encounters with Balthazar he shows a cruel streak to animals that is reflected in the way he treats Marie. As the donkey grows up it, too, is treated harshly by a succession of masters. Like Marie, it has no control over its own life.

We follow the lives of the villagers but, like the donkey, we can't form any attachment to them – they are mostly strangers devoid of personality, flat, ugly and cruel. The donkey tolerates his life stoically. Occasionally his ownership passes back to Marie and she generally treats him well



Human life paralleled with the life of a donkey

but he is also being “borrowed” by Gerard to aid him in his new venture, smuggling.

We can see the donkey being dragged further and further down, just like the people around him. The people don't care for their animals, though – their lives are, in many ways, as flat and harsh as that of the donkey.

The film is disjointed in places with significant parts of the story left out. This makes it hard to follow sometimes and you have to do some mental gymnastics to work out what happened. Artistic it may be, but it's also a pain in the arse.

In spite of this it's hard not to feel some sympathy for Balthazar. That sympathy does not flow on to the other characters, though. In their personality-deficient manner we are probably seeing them as the donkey does – occasional moments of kindness but a lot of ignorant cruelty.

I liked the story. I liked the donkey. I didn't like the people. Bresson seems to have suppressed any remnant of humanity in them. He couldn't have done a better character assassination job on rural French villagers if he had tried.



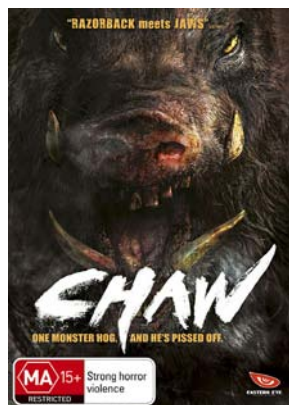
Chaw
Madman (2010)
R4 DVD

Korean with English subtitles

Following the success of *The Host* Korea seems to have fallen in love with man-eating monsters. This time it's a giant mutant pig. Left over from Japanese military experiment during the war, it and its kind have existed happily in the remote mountains of Korea but civilisation is encroaching onto its territory. Poachers are killing its food. It has been forced to turn to digging up fresh corpses from the cemetery and has got a taste for human flesh.

A young policeman has been sent to the village of Sameri as punishment for being overzealous at his job in Seoul. He arrives just as the desecration of the graves is being investigated. Other bodies, or bits of them, are turning up torn to pieces. An old hunter who lives in the village recognises the remains as the work of a wild boar. Since the village is trying to attract investment from weekend farmers the mayor goes into denial at the thought of anything spoiling his moneymaking ideas. Does this sound like the plot from that early movie about a large shark? Yes, it does.

When villagers are attacked he must admit defeat and hire some of Korea's best hunters to go after the shark (sorry, pig). They kill a large pig, the mayor declares the case closed and everyone is happy except the chief hunter and the old man. They know it's the wrong pig since they have cut open its stomach and not found the human remains expected. Somewhere out there is an even larger pig. It will not be happy that its



A Korean version of Razorback

mate has been killed. During the village celebrations that night the pig attacks in scenes that are not too far removed from the Australian film *Razorback*.

The next day a team of the hunters, an ecologist and the policeman set out to kill the pig (again). They find it has babies and use a piglet to lure the boar into a trap in an old factory, where it is killed with the aid of some old dynamite conveniently left lying around (in a factory? What did they make there?). They may have got the boar but its progeny are still out there, growing bigger.

The film is dreadfully derivative – yes, you HAVE seen it all before – but it's so well done that I was able to sit back and thoroughly enjoy it. There are just enough light moments built into the plot to make it more of a dark comedy than a monster movie and the ups and downs between humour and terror kept it interesting all the way through. The CGI is pretty good, although the mechanical pig has a lot of trouble turning corners. The characters are good if a little stereotyped, the acting is good, the photography is good. What more could you want in a mutant pig horror film?



Super hog

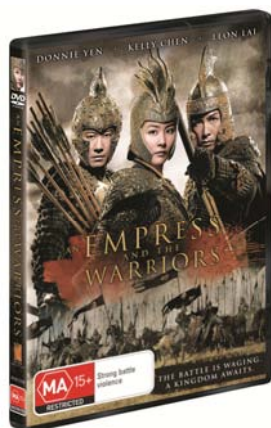


An Empress and the Warriors
Icon Home
Entertainment 2008
R4 DVD

Subtitled in English

In recent years the Chinese film industry has begun to reach outwards to sell its products to the rest of the world. It has got past the propaganda stage and is producing high quality work especially in the costume period drama area. With China's long history there is plenty to choose from. Not for them the British costume dramas of pointless people living boring lives, or the European style of knights in armour acting with chivalry. A Chinese period piece will be full of conflict, betrayal and huge bloody battles. Often these are based on periods in China's history as the country struggled towards unification. This film is a fantasy set in the period before the powerful emperors began unifying the many kingdoms.

Princess Yan Feier is the daughter of the king of Yan. The king is badly injured in a battle with the army of neighbouring Zhao and he passes command to his adopted orphan son, Muyong. He warns Muyong to beware of the hidden enemies. Muyong's imminent promotion enrages the king's nephew, Wu Ba. Wu Ba has earned the king's displeasure because he wastes men in battle, is cruel and seeks only his own glory. He assassinates the king and is set to take command of the kingdom when the Prime Minister announces the king's death and choice of successor. Muyong, sensing that the generals will not accept him as their leader, works a swift



verbal change of course and claims that the king named his daughter as the new commander. Perhaps the generals will accept a woman of royal descent more readily than an illegitimate orphan? The generals are reluctant but the princess states that if she is to lead men in battle she will undergo full military training first. This satisfies the generals but Wu Ba arranges to have her assassinated.

One day while training in the forest she is attacked by a group of Wu Ba's men and is struck by a poisoned dart. She is saved by a young reclusive man who lives deep in the forest and is a doctor. Over the days of her recovery she begins to fall in love with him despite her feelings for Hu, who has grown up with her. The doctor tells her that fighting for peace is a better goal than fighting for glory or conquest.

When she returns to the kingdom she finds Wu Ba is turning the generals against Muyong. More importantly the Zhou have chosen this time to invade the kingdom of Yan so she must, as promised, lead her troops into battle. Wu Ba and his cronies have taken many troops out of the battle so Yan is desperately outnumbered. Muyong devises a trap using Yan Feier as the bait. If it works he will capture the Zhou king. It works, but rather than execute the Zhou king and continue the ancient blood feud she makes peace with the Zhou king and his son.

With that out of the way she punishes the generals who deserted her and humiliates Wu Ba. Then she announces her abdication in favour of Muyong and returns to the forest to be with the doctor. Wu Ba will not let it rest there, though. He sends assassins after her and kills off the loyal generals. If he cannot win power by any other means he will take it by force. Finally there must be a showdown between Muyong, Yan Feier and Wu Ba.

It is a great story, full of the spectacle we have become used to in this genre of film. It may have been westernised a little to cater for overseas tastes, but it still retains a distinctive Chinese feeling. As usual the acting, direction and photography are superb. The costuming, especially the armour, is an area the Chinese excel in and this film is no exception. The detail of the armour and fighting equipment is elaborate and beautiful. The film is everything you could want in a Chinese epic.



King Yan

The Eye 2
Lions Gate
Entertainment
R1 DVD

The Eye 2 is the sequel to the Pang Brothers' immensely popular 2002 psychic horror film starring Angelica Lee, considering the quite extraordinary conclusion to the first film it is a hard act to follow.



The Eye 2 is a different sort of tale, in many ways it is more low-key and has a stronger philosophical content with a marked emphasis on drama. It centres on Joey who has had some difficult relationships, when she is dumped for a third time she decides to opt out altogether. Her suicide attempt not only fails but she finds she is pregnant, cannot get rid of the child and sees ghosts.

While these ghosts seem intimidating they are different from what we are used to seeing in J-Horror films. In most Japanese horror the spirits are the "hungry ghosts" of Buddhist mythology returning to wreak revenge, fulfil a grudge or right a wrong. Here the ghosts are reincarnating spirits waiting to be reborn. While Joey is terrified by their presence she slowly comes to understand their role in the cycle of reincarnation.

The Eye 2 is certainly a film heavy on Buddhist philosophy and while this will not appeal to all, it does give the tale a very different twist. These are not bloodthirsty ghosts but lost souls simply wishing a chance to return to the land of the



The ghosts you see in *The Eye 2* are very different from what we are used to in J-Horror and give the film a totally different feel



Terror in the lift, what do these spirits want ?

living and try once again.

Joey sees a spirit which seems to be personally attached to her and who committed suicide at a local rail station. The tale becomes more complicated as Joey comes to understand that the ghost she sees is her ex-boyfriend Sam's wife of whom she had no knowledge of. When his wife found out about Joey and Sam's affair she committed suicide, now she wishes to return to the world through Joey's child as reincarnation not only offers a new life but involves the loss of the painful memory of the last incarnation.

This is quite a fascinating tale; it takes quite a while to get a handle on the ghosts and when you come to understand what they are you realize what a novel approach the directors have taken. The film has excellent character development, an interesting plot and some superb CGI and horror effects. The scenes when Joey attempts to throw herself off a hospital roof a number of times but cannot die are very powerful.

The slow revelation that these are ghosts wishing to return to the world of the living rather than the traditional vengeful spirits takes quite a period of time during which the suspense is well handled.

The Eye 2 certainly is not quite as "tight" as the first film, but is certainly innovative. Many have felt the high drama and emotional content overrides the horror aspects of the tale and while this may be so, especially in the final quarter, the uniqueness of this take on the ghost tale is refreshing.

Eurotika: European Cult Cinema

Eurotika is a twelve part BBC series made for Channel 4 which covers all aspects of European cult cinema. It focuses on the Sixties and Seventies and offers extensive coverage of major directors, studios, themes and motifs. Sadly this series is not available on DVD but can be found by online by careful searching. Each episode is around 15-20 minutes and offers an excellent introduction to various aspects of the genre.

The series features rare interviews with a diverse range of directors, actors and producers within the genre and offers a good introduction to the field.

Episode 1 Virgins and Vampires (Jean Rollin)

Virgins and Vampires takes a look at the life of Jean Rollin, a director best known for his highly erotized vampire flicks. Born in 1938, he has spent his life exploring what could be best defined as the fantastique where sex and violence meet. He was a pioneer of French cinema making the first French vampire film (*Le Viol du vampire*, 1968) as well as the first French gore film (*Les Raisins de la mort*, 1978).



His work is marked by surrealism, eroticism (including explicit content) and a focus on atmosphere and mood over plot. His work is an acquired taste, loved and hated in equal amounts he is nevertheless a significant director within European cinema.

Episode 2 The Diabolical Mr. Franco: The Films of Jess Franco

The Diabolical Mr. Franco explores the life and times of Spanish director Jess Franco, the creator of the first Spanish adult films as well as countless horror, cult and exploitation titles. Beginning his days as an assistant to Orson Welles he brought lesbian eroticism to vampires and took horror in a very new direction.

Two of his most memorable films are *Vampyros Lesbos*, which is still celebrated as a unique eroto-horror which moulded sex, sleaze and



gore to create a new cinematic form and *99 Women* which is considered one of the pioneer works in the Women in Prison genre.

He has made over 200 films and discovered such screen beauties as Lina Roday. He continues to make films today.



Episode 3 Blood and Black Lace: A Short History of the Italian Horror Film

Italian horror has a unique feel; it has a Baroque style and places a strong emphasis on mood and atmosphere. In many ways the look and sound of an Italian horror film is as important as its plot and characters. This episode looks at such directors as Mario Bava, Dario Argento, and Lucio Fulci and covers both Italian Horror and crime thrillers known as Giallo. These were named after the sleazy yellow crime paperbacks which were sold cheaply throughout Italy and offered convoluted plots mixed with lashings of sex, violence and gore.

Episode 4 From Barcelona to Tunbridge Wells: The Films of Jose Larraz

This episode looks at the films of Jose Larraz, a filmmaker largely overlooked outside Europe.

A Spanish director of controversial exploitation and horror films, he is best known for *Vampyres* (1974), he is still making films.



Episode 5 French Blue: Erotic Films of France

France went through a revolution in the Sixties and Seventies. As the government changed and people power took to the streets so a transformation took place within cinema. Under pressure the government removed laws against adult content in 1975 and between 1976 and 1983 the market was flooded with all manner of innovative and creative titles, most of which are still unseen outside France.



Many of these titles were produced by Alpha France which make 150 films during the period. In competition with American adult imports the French adult industry produced innovative and challenging explicit titles which combined a unique erotic style with sex, politics even horror.

Sadly the creative experiment ended when the French government decided to hit US porn imports with a hefty tax and French adult producers were no longer under pressure to produce innovative product. The French cinema sex bubble burst mid eighties and never really picked up again.

06 A Life in Four Chapters: The Films of Jose Benazeraf

"It is a pity to see sex movies invaded by mediocrity"

A classic example of the radical spirit of French eroticism is controversial French erotic filmmaker Jose Benazeraf, who, now in his 70s, continues to make erotica.

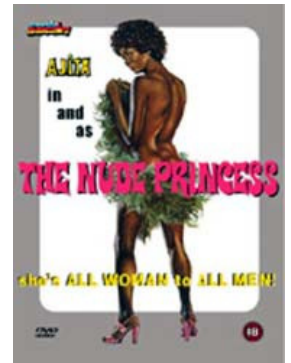


His explicit sex titles which date from the 1970's were unique in that they combined radical politics with sex, including calls to revolution even violence within the context of adult cinema. His work challenged and shocked many filmgoers even going as far as to include Marxist and Trotskyite commentaries in many of his works.

Episode 7 So Sweet, So Perverse: Women of European Sexploitation

This is a fascinating episode focused on the women of European sexploitation cinema.

From Femme Fatale's to sex kittens including profiles of the films of Dagmar Lassander, Daniela Giordano-Karin, Schubert, Brigitte Lahaie, Orchidea de Santis, Lina Romay, Erika Blanc, Laura Gemser and the transsexual Ajita Wilson.



There are also clips from such memorable films as Pussy Talk, Femina Ridens, The Devil's Nightmare, Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion, Werewolf Woman, The Nude Princess and many others.



Episode 8 Strange Behaviour: Cult Films of Eurocine Studios

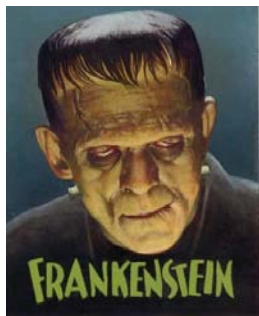
Eurocine cinema is a French cinema company which played a consistently significant role within the development of European cult cinema. Founded in 1937, Eurocine is managed by Marius Lesoeur whose involvement with Eurocine goes back to its origins with the shooting of "Mr Breloque has Disappeared".

Since that time it has produced and distributed some of the best known horror, cult and exploitation films including many titles by Jess Franco. While always low budget, their films have proved highly successful and represent an important aspect of European cult cinema.

Episode 9 Is There a Doctor in the House?

Episode 9 examines the quintessential horror motif that of medicine gone bad. From the sick doctor to the twisted surgeon, the insane psychiatrist or the mad scientist, the portrayal of science in horror films has always been problematic.

From the wildly popular Frankenstein to the mondo films which exploit the sexual proclivities of the supposedly mentally ill it is astounding just how much mileage horror has got out of this motif.



This episode includes clips from Dr. Jekyll & The Werewolf, Murder In A Blue World, Female Vampire, Night Of The Doomed, Devil's Kiss, The Awful Dr. Orloff, Vampyros Lesbos, Faceless and Am Frigid...Why?

Episode 10 I am a Nymphomaniac: The Erotic Films of Max Pecas

Max Pecas is a name to conjure with in French eroticism yet nearly unheard of outside France. From his earliest thriller *Vicious Circle* to his wild sex films, *I am a Nymphomaniac* and *Luxuria*, he has made a name for himself making stylish erotica.



He has made some twenty seven films in all and worked with such talents as Elke Sommer, Anne Libert, and Sandra Julien.

Episode 11 Blood and Sand: All You Ever Wanted to Know About Spanish Horror Films

Spanish Horror takes a different path to the dark side, unusually macabre with a sense of style all of its own it made a name for itself during the Seventies with such directors as Jess Franco, Amando de Ossorio and of course, Paul Naschy. Naschy who went from writer to actor to



director became the Spanish Vincent Price, starring in a vast numbers of films. For some unique reason Spain became obsessed with the Werewolf and Naschy made the role his own time and time again. Spanish Horror also took inspiration from its past when it came to the undead focusing in on the "Knight Templars"; this was especially evident in the Blind Dead films of Amando de Ossorio and his Templar series.



Episode 12 The Blood Beast: The Films of Michael Reeves

Michael Reeves was a flawed and troubled genius who sadly died at a very young age. Obsessed with cinema since childhood he produced three unique films *She Beast* (Revenge of the Blood Beast), *The Sorcerers* and *Witchfinder General*. *Witchfinder General* aka *The Conqueror Worm* is still seen as one of more significant English horror titles. This episode includes interviews with his friend English actor Ian Ogilvy, award winning author Iain Sinclair; and Paul Maslansky, who produced his first film.

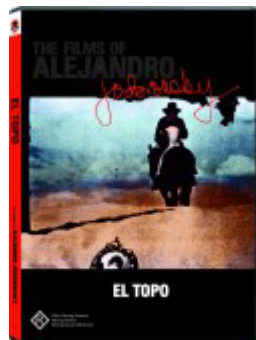


Midnight Movies
Starz Home
Entertainment
R1 DVD
Released in Australia
by Roadshow
R4 DVD

Midnight Movies from the Margin to the Mainstream is an 86 minute documentary charting the development of Midnight movies with a focus on six key films. It includes interviews with a range of key directors, distributors and filmmakers as well as extensive clips from each film.



The film opens with an exploration of *El Topo* by Alejandro Jodorowsky. *El Topo* is a marvellously enigmatic film mixing a spaghetti western plot with violent, sexual and ritual content. Its foreign exoticism made it a unique unusual film and it was not well received in the general cinema market. Accordingly the Elgin Theatre decided to try it at midnight, marketing the film to the college student audience and the Midnight movie was born. The first showings had little success, but soon patrons were lined up around the block.

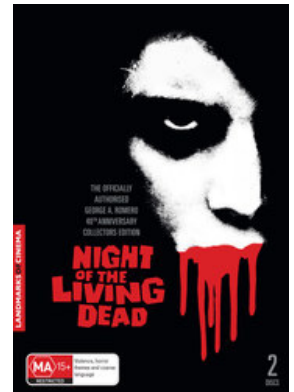


While many other films were used within the Midnight movie slot such as *Freaks* by Todd Browning and even *Witchcraft Through the Ages*



The Night of the Living Dead is still considered the classic zombie film

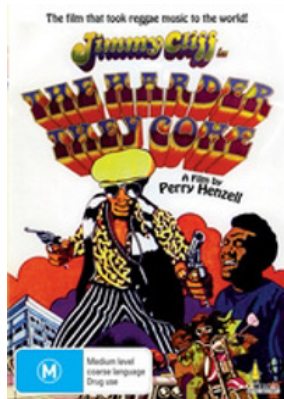
es with a commentary by William Burroughs, none were especially successful. The next big discovery was *The Night of the Living Dead*. Romero took the classic zombie horror film and took it one step further with extreme gore (for the time), a political message and a palatable sense of terror. It was an instant success.



As New Line Cinema searched around for new films to distribute they came across the old drug paranoia title *Reefer Madness* which became a great Midnight classic. At the same time they were contacted by an unknown young filmmaker, John Waters, from Baltimore with a film called *Multiple Maniacs*, while interested they passed, asking him to send on a more polished production. Waters next film, *Pink Flamingos*, shocked and horrified a nation. Considered the filthiest film ever made, it has singing asshole, shit eating drag queens and everything in-between. It is still considered the most outrageous Midnight movie ever made and put New Line Cinema on the map.



Strangely *Pink Flamingos* was followed by a very different sort of Midnight movie. *The Harder They Come* was a Jamaican made film which brought Reggae to America and set the stage for Bob Marley arriving on U.S. Soil.

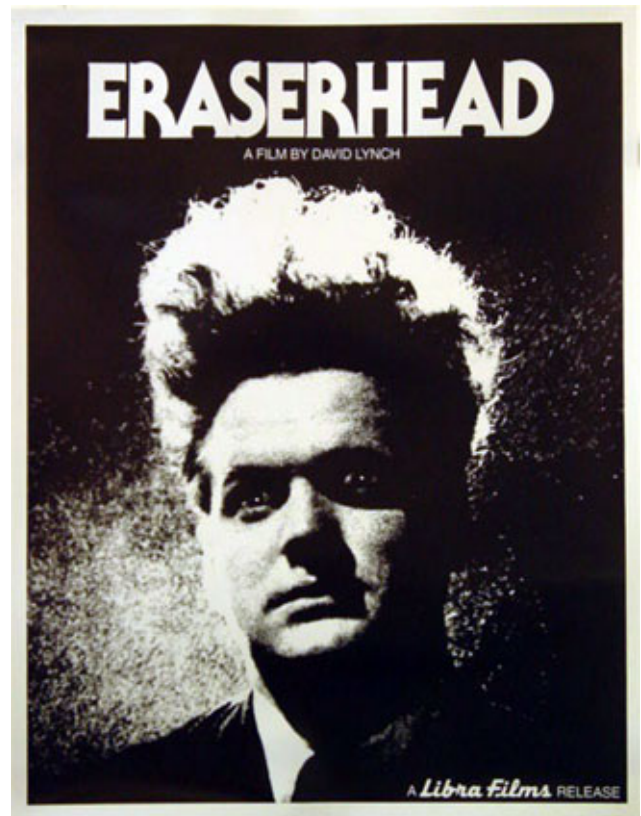


One of the best known Midnight movies which also crossed over into mainstream cinema was *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. A bizarre, sexually ambiguous celebration of difference it developed from a live show into a failed Hollywood musical. However when the film hit the Midnight circuit it developed fan clubs across the world and has continued to be the longest running Midnight movie ever released. Its musical mix of glam and punk has continued to spawn all manner of new adaptations as well as re-enactment clubs and audience participation nights.



Eraserhead by David Lynch is considered the last true Midnight movie. It was very different from what had gone before.

A bleak art film with an industrial score, it was a very slow-mover and only became a success due to the dogged persistence of the distribution companies and its promotion by John Waters.



As home video became a new form of distribution, the time of the Midnight movie passed. Soon cult films could be enjoyed in the privacy of your own home and while the joy of watching a strange film with friends at a midnight showing may have passed, new digitally remastered of rare films, now available on DVD, means they can survive the ravages of time forever.

El Topo is available in Australia from Siren Visual as well as other films by Jodorowsky.

The Night of the Living Dead has had multiple releases including special editions, a nice 40th Anniversary edition is available in Australia from Beyond Home Entertainment.

Pink Flamingos is still banned in Australia, uncut editions are available in R1 from the U.S.

The Harder They Come was released in Australia by Shock.

Rocky Horror Picture Show has had multiple releases in various editions including a special edition in large set of lips from the U.K. (R2)

Eraserhead has a superb special edition release from Shock, remastered and in high definition.



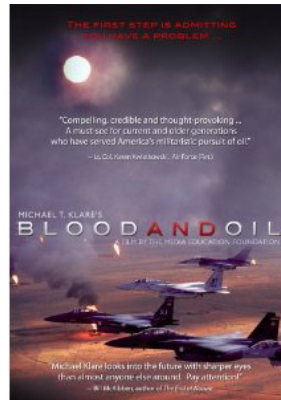
Tim Curry as Frankfurter

**Blood and Oil
Media Education
Foundation (2008)
R1 DVD**

Michael T Klare's important documentary serves two purposes. It gives a concise yet comprehensive history of the United States foreign policy as it related to oil supplies from World War II until the present, and more sinister, it shows how readily the media, especially in the U.S., are ready and willing to accept whatever they are told almost without question.

World War II used up almost a third of the world's known oil reserves. Recognising that the U.S. could never again be self-sufficient in oil President Harry Truman arrived at a policy that would protect access to the Middle East oil reserves. This policy was known as the Truman Doctrine and proposed supporting stable regimes in the area. They in turn would ensure supplies of oil to the U.S. Successive Presidents endorsed the policy but it had its weaknesses. One by one the countries fell to alternate regimes – Kuwait to invasion by Iraq, Iran to a religious-led revolution, and Iraq to the mercenary Saddam Hussein. Only Saudi Arabia seemed to hold out (mostly by ruthless suppression of opposition by its leaders) and even it is now facing internal dissent from religious extremists.

The U.S. is now in a dilemma. It can't afford the continuing military presence in the Middle East but if it withdraws it risks losing its supply at the whim of hostile governments. It is now examining African nations as a possible replacement source.



"America is addicted to oil.."
George W Bush

This understanding goes back as far as President Roosevelt, but successive policies have been concerned not with reducing the addiction or finding alternatives but with securing the supplies of what is left.

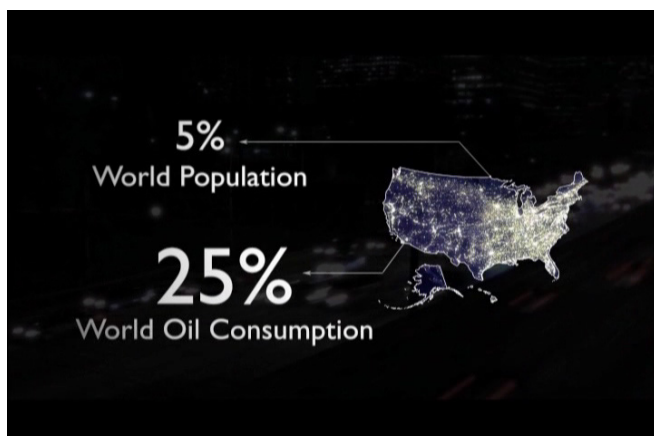
The question of the media is a different matter. Mostly the U.S. reporters accepted what they were told without question. If your President said Iraq had weapons of mass destruction it was unpatriotic to question this, even when it became obvious that he had lied. It was left to foreign journalists to find out the truth. Klare gives an example of government officials saying the Iraq invasion was necessary to protect the oil supply lines, then hurriedly changing the reasons to "Saddam is a monster" or "Saddam has weapons of mass destruction". A poll of citizens showed that the majority thought oil was not worth going to war over.

There is no doubt that a constriction in the flow of oil would cause massive economic hardship in the U.S. but successive governments have simply refused to come to grips with the problem. A Presidential advisory committee on energy policy appears to have only been given evidence by the existing three main energy suppliers – coal, oil and nuclear. Alternative supplies like solar or tidal or geothermal do not appear to have been investigated.

The government has refused the results or details of what witnesses appeared so the people of America are unable to question the report. The main thrust seems to be not to reduce oil dependency but to increase oil extraction regardless of environmental damage. This may include drilling in sensitive areas like the Arctic.

Meanwhile the U.S. keeps going on its way pretending that the crunch will never come. We need documentaries like this to inject some reality into the situation.

"Our military policy and our energy policy have become intertwined. They have become one and the same... And if we continue to rely on military force to solve our resource needs, we're in for a very bloody and dangerous and painful century indeed."
– Michael Klare



Bally Master Indie Flix

Scott Baker is a very unusual magician. His act is way off the usual magic tricks and has a large element of danger. The usual card tricks aren't for Scott – he prefers cutting his arm off, eating glass and razorblades, or tying ropes around his neck to strangle himself.

He started in show business at an early age. He grew up in the Bible Belt of the United States, and when he was three he and his mother went to the Tulsa Fair. There the famous stripper Gypsy Rose Lee invited them in to the show and later into her dressing room. Scott recalls “even at three I’m hanging around in a dressing room with strippers”. Some kids have tough childhoods.

He took an interest in magic when he got a Magic Set for Christmas, but over the years his act has changed to the dark side of the magical arts. His inspiration ranges from the immortal Harry Houdini to the work of the Indian fakirs. Even so, to see Scott in action spruiking out in front of a show is to recall those days of Side-show Alley. He has the patter and the presentation and it shows right through his act. Partly this results from training as an actor.

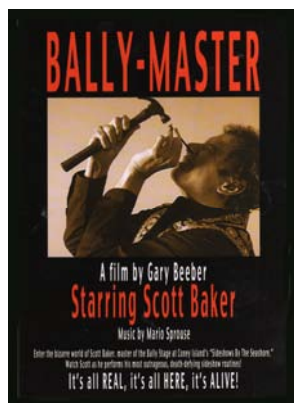
He now uses these vocal skills to make his performance more ominous and threatening. Scott is a master of the demonic laughter and mad look. He is based at Coney Island, New York where he is well known.

Strangely Scott works as Santa Claus at Bloomingdale’s during winter. I guess even a magician likes to keep warm. He also teaches Sunday School, using interactive magic to enhance the Bible stories.

In this short (22 minutes) DVD we see a number of short acts that give a good idea of his style and presentation. It’s not the sort of show you would take the kiddies to in case it inspires them to try the tricks themselves.

Indie Flix

<http://www.indieflix.com/film/bally-master-30517/>



The Lady in Question is Charles Busch Docurama All Region NTSC DVD

The Lady in Question is Charles Busch is a fascinating documentary exploring the life of Charles Busch, a cross-gender performer who brought life to the East Village of New York City and revitalized New York gay entertainment. While Busch is described as a “drag artist”, it is term I think is ultimately rather limiting. He does not lip-synch or offer impersonations he writes, directs and performs his own works in which he has lovingly created roles based on the great Divas of film history.

He is really a method actor who uses a female persona to explore all manner of strange and wonderful storylines. At the same time he combines these with a great sense of humour, biting satire and insightful look at the nature of human experience.

The documentary gives a candid overview of his life, his early on stage performances and the development of his work at the Limbo Lounge from which his unique stage company evolved.

A combination of his own talent and a group of truly eccentric outsiders gave birth to such plays as *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*, *The Lady in Question*, *Red Scare on Sunset*, *Shanghai Moon*, *Psycho Beach Party* and *Die Mommie Die!* which became a successful film release starring Jason Priestley.

In more recent times, after a brush with death, he went on to pen a major Hollywood stage play in the form of *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*. The documentary offers a comprehensive biography combining rare clips of his plays, performances, films and insight into his life and experiences.

There are over 90 minutes of extras including *Her Royal Escape to Love* (a Charles Busch tale), *In the Life* a Backstory and lots more. It also features Rosie O'Donnell, BD Wong, Boy George, Jason Priestley, Julie Halston, Michael Musto, and many others.

The Lady in Question is Charles Busch won the best documentary in the 2007 International Gay Film Awards.



**Heinrich Himmler
Anatomy of a Mass
Murderer
First Run Features
R1 DVD**

"The best political weapon is the weapon of terror. Cruelty commands respect. Men may hate us, but we don't ask for their love; only for their fear"



Himmler certainly achieved terror. His policies for treatment of the Jews in World War II kept them in terror of the Nazis, and his elite private army, the SS, kept the Nazis themselves in line.

This documentary tries to explain how a man of modest background, certainly no example of the pure Aryan type so beloved of Hitler, came to be the second highest-ranking Nazi. He had a powerful influence over Hitler and controlled a slave-powered industrial system that was a source of profit and power for the Nazis. In his fairly short career he was responsible for the enslavement of hundreds of thousands of workers from the occupied countries and indirectly responsible for the extermination of millions of Jews.

Such a man deserves a better examination than history seems to have given him. This documentary goes a long way to redress the balance and show how such a monster could reach such a high position. His early life was comfortable. Although he longed to be a soldier in World War I he proved sickly and unsuited for the military life. Between the wars he developed an anti-Semitic tendency that only flowered when Hitler rose to power. In Himmler, Hitler found a brother anti-Semite who had the organisational ability that Hitler lacked. Hitler became the demagogue, Himmler the power behind the scene. As part of this power Himmler was given the post of Deputy Head of the SS. At this time the SS was a party protection group. Himmler set about re-organising it into a more paramilitary operation as Nazi party rallies began to cover more of Germany. He finally achieved the post of head of the Munich Police and used this position to eventually take control of the German Police force.

The documentary mentions some of the oddities of the SS. It covers the almost religious nature of many SS ceremonies, and mentions Himmler's



ler's plan that SS members, being selected for their Aryan qualities, should be allowed two wives each so they could produce more blond-haired children. Himmler himself was the antithesis of these ideals although he did have a secret second wife.

As control of Europe tightened he was able to plan the development of the massive slave labour camp system that Germany depended on for so much of its industrial wealth. Many of the camps were for Jews and came to have extermination facilities built alongside them. Although the extermination work was initially allotted to Heydrich under Goering's general administration, Himmler maintained a strong interest in the system. It was his SS troops that manned the camps.

Eventually it all came crashing down as the Allies took Germany. Himmler tried to escape dressed as an ordinary soldier but was captured and committed suicide.

There is a lot of documentary footage that I haven't seen before, plus a rare recording of Himmler addressing SS officials about the extermination of the Jews and warning them that it must not be mentioned outside the room. Interviews are concentrated on three individuals – Katrin Himmler (Heinrich's grand-niece), John Steiner, a surviving SS officer, and Lucille Eichengreen, a survivor of the camps. Between the three they paint a good picture of this dreadful man and his organization.

Interestingly the documentary is a little different from many on the subject of the concentration camps. The commentary is held to fairly matter-of-fact details without so much of the emotional hand-wringing. This, I think, makes the documentary more of historical record rather than emotional impact. It is still a powerful insight into the man / monster.

**The Lost World of
Communism**
BBC
ABC DVD
R4 DVD

Traditionally the history of political empires have been told from the top down; we learn about the various theories which underlies the structures involved and biographies tend to focus on power brokers and people of significance.

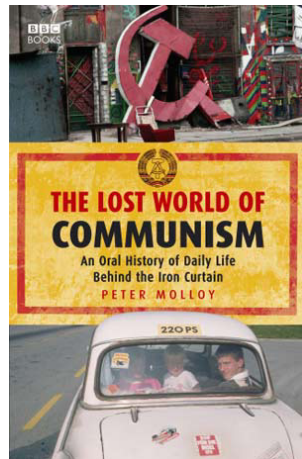
The Lost World of Communism, it focuses on the average person and their experience of everyday life under a political system very different from our own. The filmmakers have been very astute choosing three different communist regimes which each had their own interpretation of the socialist ideal. The regimes chosen are East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania during the period of the Cold War.

The series is presented in three episodes of approximately 51 minutes each, with an episode on each regime. While 1989 may have been the year in which communism fell and Central Europe the reverberations of these regimes continue to be felt and will continue to be felt for some time to come. The structure of each episode is a balance between historical narrative and a series of interviews.

The interviews are well chosen bringing together both interviews with "average" people and significant individuals who played a role in the regimes. These divergent interviews allow us to gain a clear appreciation of both the history and nature of the political structure and the life of the average person living within it.

To help us gain insight into lives within these countries, many individuals have opened up their private lives offering precious photographs, films and recordings never seen before. The filmmakers, once again, work hard to avoid bias and interview a wide and diverse range of people including those who dislike the regimes they lived under, those who have misgivings but have some fond memories and those who still are staunch communists.

There are also, inevitably, the tales of the vic-



tims of the regimes including the woman who in her young teens drew a funny face on Stalin's pictures and ended up in a work camp for teen years enduring years of abuse and rape. There are stories of escape, suppression of free speech, abuse and violence.

The East German case of a young athlete given so many hormones that her sex changed is a terrible reminder of the effect of the dangers of the politicization of sport.

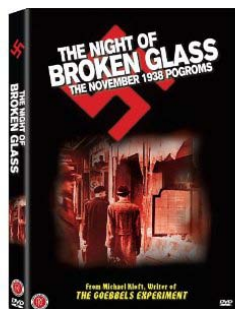
It is fascinating to see the differences between each regime. East German was a model Soviet satellite and when too many of its members started to be influenced by the West recruited 1 in 6 to work as spies shrivelling on their neighbours. Czechoslovakia tried to go its own way creating a new form of "communism with a human face" which led to an openness not seen in other communist states. This "Prague Spring" did not last long leading to Czechoslovakia being invaded by the U.S.S.R for leaving pure socialism behind.

Romania was a different case altogether, a communist state which was more aligned to North Korea than to the U.S.S.R, it was run by a family empire which enforced their own strange values on a whole nation. It is also the only state in which the leader and his wife were executed when the people revolted against their suppressive control.

This is a revealing series, superbly constructed, filled with rare and unusual footage; offering insights into both the political and private side of the Communist experience.

The Night of Broken Glass First Run Features R1 DVD

This detailed documentary covers the steady increasing persecution of the Jews of Germany during the Nazi Party's rise to power.



With confirmed anti-Semites like Himmler in the party the persecution started early with Jews being singled out for beatings and other random acts of violence. Those Jews who could see the persecution coming left Germany early. The later departees were forced to sacrifice everything they couldn't carry to the State. The "taxes" on departures and the sale of Jewish properties brought revenue to the State and encouraged a forced emigration policy, although gradually the rest of the world started putting up barriers to these refugees. There are two areas here that are rarely examined. Why did the Jews meekly put up with it, and why did the German people allow it? The threat of Himmler's SS and Heydrich's gangs of Brownshirts may explain the second, but the attitude of the Jews who stayed behind has rarely been examined.

There seems to have been a blind "it won't happen to us" attitude in spite of the increasing violence, exclusion from schools and workplaces, and anti-Jewish propaganda and legislation. Since this was obviously sponsored by the State it should have been clear warning to those who remained but hundreds of thousands ignored it.

Once the Nazis had control of the Police they effectively owned the streets. The pace of beatings, assaults and shop smashings was stepped up. It took a few years of ceaseless propaganda to do it but many Germans had now come to believe in "the evil Jew" and if they didn't actually take part they certainly condoned the violence.

The major action took place on the nights of the ninth and tenth of November 1938. In a coordinated series of attacks over four hundred synagogues and other buildings were burned and over seven thousand Jewish businesses were looted and destroyed by the Hitler Youth, Gestapo and SS. Fire Departments were forced by the SS to stand idly by or concentrated on saving adjoining houses. Police arrested over 26,000 Jewish men and shipped them off to



Shocking and powerful original footage

concentration camps. More than 90 people were killed on the one night. This night became known as Kristallnacht for the massive amounts of broken glass as the buildings were destroyed.

The excuse was the assassination of a German diplomat by a young Jew, Herschel Greenspan, in Paris. His family had been a victim of one of the earlier pogroms and he wanted his revenge. Unfortunately he gave the Nazis the excuse they needed to start the organised campaign against his fellow Jews.

Worse was to come. Kristallnacht marked the start of organised large-scale arrests, deportations and imprisonments. The concentration camps and work camps, originally established to put pressure on the Jews to leave Germany, became increasingly used to provide slave labour to major industrial concerns, and led to the "Final Solution" – the extermination of the remaining Jews in Germany.

The film contains much horrifying footage, but unfortunately does little to explain the attitudes of the German or Jewish people. Those attitudes led to millions of deaths. These include many of the people who could have offered some sort of explanation as to why they did nothing.



Mindless anti-Semitism used for political ends

Reclaiming the Blade Galatia Films (2009) All Regions DVD

The documentary details much of the history of the sword as a killing weapon in the Renaissance times before it was overtaken by the increasing use of firearms. It begins with the romance of the sword as shown in modern film. Gradually through interviews with people like legendary swordmaster Bob Anderson, who taught many great Hollywood actors to handle swords, we find out more of the history of these weapons. We learn that in its day swordsmanship was quite a science, with less of the Errol Flynn swashbuckling and more skill in how to strike from the most favourable stances.

It took a lot of training and skill to produce a good swordsman, which is why there is still respect for the weapon today. There are more battle-axes in existence than swords. Many textbooks were published about swordsmanship but most have been forgotten for centuries and are only now being used to shed light on the techniques of battle.

Swords survive in modern times in a few guises. There is the Olympic sport of fencing, somewhat stylised and using a limited range of swords. Japanese Kendo still maintains some of the old traditions of the kenjutsu which dates back to the 1100s in Japan. As one swordsman points out, though, it is hard to tell how many of the original techniques have been lost or modified. There are the re-enactment groups who try to keep the techniques and interest alive, and it is these, particularly in Europe, who are investigating the old literature.

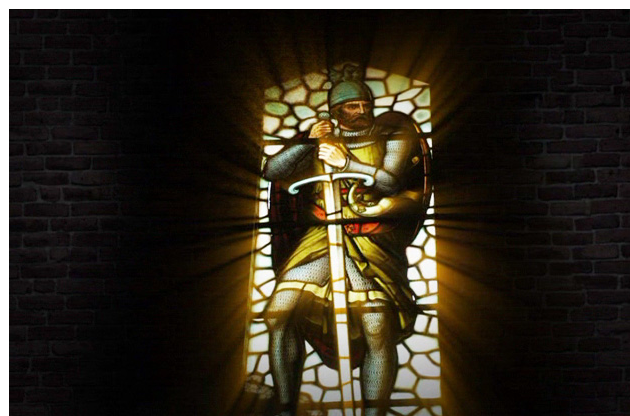


We see re-enactment groups in training and I was struck by the effort they put into making their moves and training as authentic as possible. It is not just a bunch of people out for a weekend hack and slash but a serious effort to recreate the martial techniques of swordplay.

We look (far too briefly) at the styles and construction of swords. The technology behind sword manufacture is quite amazing but is little understood or appreciated today. The remains of a sword recovered in Britain reveals some of the advanced techniques. It is built from multiple strands of metals that give it tremendous strength and flexibility. It is one of only about five swords known worldwide made by this technique.

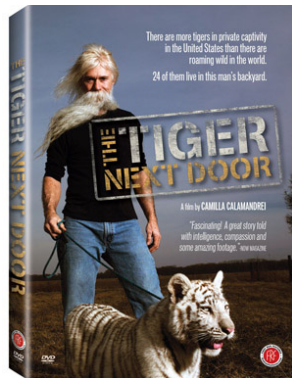
Modern sword reconstructers are gradually re-learning the old techniques but with so little original material available it is a long process. It must often rely on guesswork.

I was a little put off by the emphasis on films at the start of the documentary, but by the end I could see where they were leading to. Films like *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Lord of the Rings* may not be entirely technically accurate but they serve to keep these weapons in front of the public as an important piece of history.



The Tiger Next Door First Run Pictures R1 DVD

Dennis Hill keeps tigers – that's right tigers, and he keeps them in his back yard. He has been known to have up to thirty of them as well as other wild cats, bears as well as domestic pets.



He has split his small town community of Flat Rock, Indiana right down the middle. There are those who support him on what seem to be political ground; they talk about freedom, the evils of too much government control and so on. On the other side are local families and businessmen who are worried a tiger will escape and run the four minutes to Flat Rock and cause havoc.

For some fifteen years he has run his business but after repeated concerns about the way he keeps his animals from animal refuges which have been picking up the pieces, the government steps in. His property is inspected and he loses his license to keep exotic animals. He is given 30 days to find homes for the majority of his animals and only then will a permit be considered for three wild cats be considered.

The film follows the experiences of Dennis as battles against the government to keep what he considers to be "his animals". We get insight into his journey to his present stage in life including a battle with drug addiction and brushes with the law. At first the viewer seems sympathetic to Dennis, he seems like a little man battling against all odds and one who clearly loves his animals. However as the story progresses the conditions and health of the animals begins to weigh on the viewer and my opinion certainly began to change.

A number of scenes brought home to me how much of this debate was about people's rights instead of what was right for the animals. In the Town Hall discussion about Dennis' license nobody discussed the health of the animals; it was all about their safety, business concerns or Dennis' rights.

It seems as though the primary concern was Dennis' God-given right to own any animal he wants with little or no discussion of whether it is right to do so or worse, the consequences of



Frightening situation where a Bengal Tiger had been kept in a small flat.

Photo: John Roca, Daily News

owning, breeding, buying and selling exotic animals.

The second scene was the fiery argument between the owner of a wild cat refuge and Dennis. Dennis finally reveals his motives when he admits he gave up two large red tigers' in his quest to breed an all-white tiger which would sell for many hundreds of thousands of dollars. The owner also confronts Dennis over the condition of his cats and reveals how one of the cats Dennis gave to the refuge had six abscessed teeth and died under surgery.

As the documentary progresses I became more and more disenchanted with Dennis and his desire to keep wild cats and more concerned about the plight of these beautiful animals. In many ways The Tiger Next Door also brings into focus the laxity of laws in the U.S. about keeping wild animals. It seems that under the illusion of not encroaching individual freedom, the rights of animals have been ignored and these amazing creatures have been exploited for breeding, sale and trade and worse, sometimes for their meat and body parts.

Even when Dennis has his license curtailed and can only have three wild cats one notices the conditions they are kept under and wonders if such conditions would be allowed for any domestic pet, never mind an exotic one.

This is a challenging and thought provoking documentary which will trigger lots of debate and discussion.

Fazcination
R1 DVD Series
Motorvision
MVD (<http://mvdb2b.com/>)

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

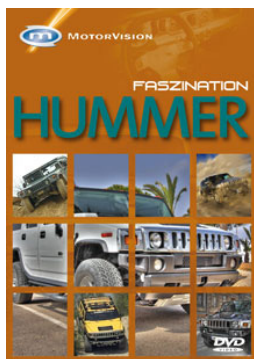
German with alternate English voiceover

OK, I may have been just a little bit wrong. In recent reviews I have complained about the bland, boring cars forced on us by the motor companies – egg-shaped, boring styling, unexciting. This series of German DVDs shows a range of vehicles that spans the wildly fast to the wildly impractical, but they are all individuals and in many cases FUN. They may not all be the stuff of Jeremy Clarkson's dreams, but there are some cars in the series that will appeal to everybody.

The Hummer

This is not egg-shaped. It is not fast. The Hummer 1 is ridiculously wide, heavy and thirsty. Only its designer would call it attractive and he would be lying. It is "as aerodynamic as the north face of the Eiger", and its price (100,000 Euros) would bankrupt a small country. With a weight of 3.5 tonnes unloaded it really needs its 160 litres of petrol tank to get it to the next service station – its fuel consumption is around 30 litres per 100 km.

It is a military vehicle meant for off-road work like the old Jeep it replaces. It has a high ground clearance and its top heaviness makes it a little unstable at highway speeds. The Hummer is big, thirsty, slow, and not known for its cornering ability, so naturally the Germans race



The Hummer



Shut Up, I Know How to Drive !

them. Uwe Zierbus and his long-suffering wife Bettina plus a team of truly dedicated mechanics are the Hummer Racing Team. The DVD follows their fortunes as Uwe sets out to win the German Off-road Championship. Bettina navigates them around the course and points out the dangerous sections where it may be necessary to slow down. Uwe ignores her, preferring a "foot flat to the floor" approach in his driving. As a result bits of the Hummer break. It is not indestructible, at least not in Uwe's hands.

With the release of the Hummer 2 a bit of common sense began to show through. It is narrower, lighter and a little less thirsty. Steel doors were no longer optional (canvas doors were standard on the Hummer 1, replaceable with armour plate doors). The interior finish was less like a tractor and catered more for comfort.

The Hummer 3 continued the move to a more rational size. The "baby" Hummer is almost usable on the road – it's still tall but at least on the highway it doesn't take up two lanes.

Being a sports commentator can be a difficult job if you are a young attractive female. People play jokes on you. "I was promised a test drive in a powerful car..." says one girl, looking at the huge Hummer 2 that she is going to take up a 45 degree slope, then bring back down again. She does a surprisingly good job of it under tuition, showing that the Hummer may not be as intimidating as it looks.

Geiger Cars in Munich have produced the ultimate Hummer. Their 200,000 euro "UberHummer" is fitted with a beefed-up 7.2 litre motor that takes it from 0 to 100 kmh in 6.5 seconds. Its 28-inch wheels give it enough ground clearance to drive over obstacles like a Mercedes. Chrome is its main decorative theme. What oil crisis?

Finally the documentary gives us a comparison between the Hummer and the Toyota Cruiser. The comparison is inconclusive. The Toyota,

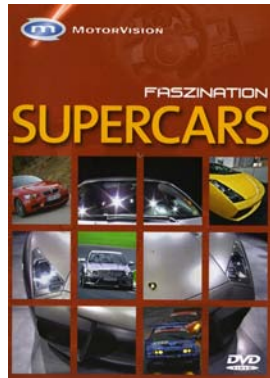
with its long history of development, is more comfortable and less thirsty off road. The Hummer is better finished and more modern-looking. It is also three times the price of the Toyota.

Supercars

This documentary is definitely the stuff of Jeremy Clarkson's dreams. Most of the footage is from various time trials and race meetings around Europe, where the car tuning companies can show off their work. Europe has many companies whose aim is to tune (we would say "hot up") a standard car. 0-60 kmh times between 3 and 4 seconds are almost compulsory. So are top speeds well over 300 kmh. Tuning an engine up to 700 horsepower or beyond is a goal that some tuners can reach. Twin turbochargers, V12 engines, carbon fibre or titanium parts are common. Any accident is going to be very expensive.

We visit Eurospares, a spare parts company that specialises in used parts for supercars. Many drivers can barely afford to buy their dream car and the petrol for it so in the event of an accident they will try here first. It is also used by those who just want to get their car back on the road as soon as possible rather than wait for new parts from the manufacturer. There is something rather sad about a Ferrari being dismantled for parts like a Christmas turkey.

There are many famous names and cars featured in this documentary – the BMW M3 is teamed against the Mercedes C63 AMG, there is the Ferrari Enzo, Pagani Zonda (from another tuning firm), and the Audi Quattro S1. The extras even give us a ride in the McLaren F1 GTR.



Beautiful Supercars

And as for the 300+ kmh Volkswagen Golf....?

With so many cars to study a number of points become obvious. The first is that these cars are almost universally impractical. A (small) driver and a packet of sandwiches is all that could fit into some of them. At least two are so impractical that they cannot be road registered in Europe and a Ferrari is so loud that it won't be registered anyhow. Another point is that the majority are simply ugly, from the BMW's "spectacle" radiator grille that was ugly when it was first designed and hasn't got any better since, to the assorted Ferraris that look like a failed origami exercise in folded metal. Painted red, of course. Many of these cars are simply expensive impracticality wrapped in mystique. Part of the mystique is the exclusive nature of some of the cars, like the Ferrari FXX – you had to be offered one by Ferrari. You won't see any American supercars in this doco. They are just too affordable. Perhaps this is just a little parochial?

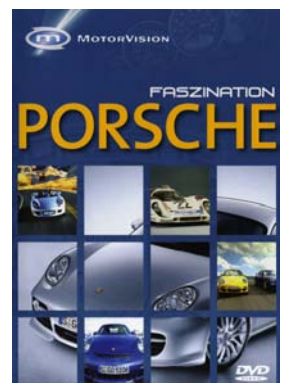
Watching them race is like watching tyrannosaurs fight – it looks spectacular but you know they are all going to become extinct in the end, killed by rising fuel costs and their own inability to adapt. Somehow, though, even the hottest Hyundai will never match their style.

Porsche

From Dr Ferry Porsche, son of the Volkswagen designer Dr Ferdinand Porsche, the Porsche was an attempt to put some sort of sporty feeling back into post-war cars. He succeeded surprisingly well considering his first 1948 model 356 was based largely on Volkswagen parts. The marque is still going strong today. It has now reached the status of a cult car and this DVD follows the development of the various models. It gives almost a model-by-model description, and it is amazing how many early Porsches are still in use, lovingly maintained by their owners.

Motor racing has always been a strong part of Porsche's development strategy. Racing puts extra stress on the car but shows up any problems with the car's balance and engineering.

The storyline follows the progress of a Porsche





A very early Porsche.

Cayenne 4 wheel drive in the Trans-Siberia Rally. Held in some of the roughest country in the world, this is a test of reliability and endurance as much as speed. The scenery is spectacular, too.

The classic Porsche 911 series, still in production in its later versions, comes in for detailed description. It was the first 911 that really made Porsche's reputation. Its racing wins gave it respectability way beyond what it had already achieved and its almost legendary reliability in the rallying world enhanced this.

One thing I liked about the DVD is the avid collectors who say their piece about their favourite car. Through them I can come to understand the passion of the Porsche enthusiast.

Modern Classic Cars

This is always a controversial area. If you ask an American what is a classic car you will get the Chevy Corvette, the Model T Ford, the Ford Mustang and so on. In Australia you would have the Falcon GTHO, Torana GTR-XU1, or FJ Holden. In Europe with their greater number of manufacturers there is a far wider range to choose from.



This DVD selects a number of cars that are no longer produced but are destined to become classics of their time. Some are not the original manufacturer's model but ones that have been modified by a tuning firm. Some of the cars are surprising selections.

Who would have thought of the Volkswagen Golf 1 GTi as a classic? Yet, viewing the DVD



Classic VW Cabriolet

and listening to the owners, it makes sense. The BMW 3.0 CSI is well on its way to being a classic by itself but the Alpina-tuned version has that extra something that makes it rare and desirable even now. But the Volkswagen Cabriolet convertible?

I was surprised to find the Datsun 240Z in there. It is recognised in America as an up-and-coming classic, but in Europe??? Yet, it too has its fans. The little "rice rocket" was seen as a poor man's Ferrari. It never attained that legendary status but it is still appreciated for what it did achieve and it marked the start of the production of sports cars from the huge Japanese factories.

The DVD is held together by the story of a group of enthusiasts trying to restore an elderly BMW 02 back to track racing condition. As they fight their way through years of rust and neglect we get a good picture of the problems facing a restorer. Parts are always a problem. Rebuilding the body may mean making up whole new panels. Finally there is that proud moment when it makes its first public appearance at the Classic Trophy race at the Nurburgring..

Once again it is the restorers and collectors who fill in the details. They are happy to talk about their passion for a particular car. You can't help sharing some of that passion as they do everything they can to "help the cars avoid a dignified retirement".

The DVD series is a little unusual. It doesn't spend all its time looking backwards and longing for the "good old days". We get a good picture of post-War car development, we see a lot of oddities and rare cars and we explore some of the extremes of car design. With fuel prices going upwards constantly these cars are going to disappear from the roads and become static museum pieces, but at least for a while longer it is good to see them in their natural environment.

**Fine Tuned
Beyond Home
Entertainment (2010)
R4 DVD**

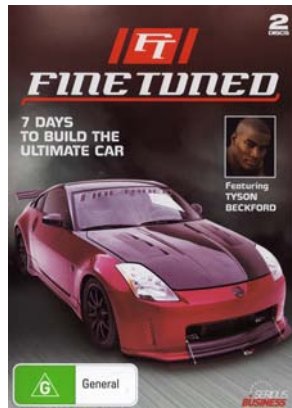
Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

“Tuning” used to mean carefully adjusting a car’s engine to produce the best results. Now it is more of a whole-car concept involving engine, suspension, bodywork, trim and paint. We have already looked at some examples of the products of European car tuners in the German series *Faszination* and assorted *Top Gears*. Now let’s have a look at the U.S. equivalents.

First, though, this show is not another “Pimp My Ride”, where the crew seem determined to hang as many bits off a standard car as possible. *Fine Tuned* takes cars from worthy but cash-strapped people and then do them up to a luxury level. If power is what is needed then the engine will be worked up. The car will be stripped and repainted and retrimmed. A few nice goodies like Pioneer sound systems will be fitted. The result will be a car beyond the owner’s dreams and often a worthy competitor to the European cars.

Presenters are Tyson Beckford, whose main job is to ripple his muscles so we can admire his tattoos, and “Lucky” Jay Hess who still believes that a Mohawk hairstyle is cool. Neither are capable of wearing their caps the right way round.

The real work is done by a team of experts. By “experts” I mean people who do not do mechanical adjustments with a hammer. They drill the hole and the part fits. This is a skill I greatly admire, since my mechanical work often involved impact adjustment of stubborn parts. It is their



Concept on computer first

skill that allows them to fit a turbocharger to a car that supposedly had one but didn’t. The owner was ripped off and his car was developing a lowly 90 horsepower at the wheels. By the time the team had finished it was putting out 200 horsepower thanks to a huge single turbocharger instead of the two smaller ones usually fitted.

Every now and then one of the experts will take the time to show us why he uses a particular part or how he does a certain job, and to the mechanically inclined this is fascinating. There is a certain amount of product placement and gratuitous advertising but that’s only to be expected when so many parts are donated.

There is just as much skill going into the trim and upholstery. The girls who do this work carry a tremendous responsibility – you may not see the engine very often, but you are going to see the upholstery every day. Their work carries as much importance in the finished car as the mechanical work.

The cars come out beautifully painted and finished and with a level of class that you just couldn’t afford in a production car. They are truly one-offs that the deserving owners can be proud of.



Honda Civic during rebuild



Very happy owner

I Want Your Skull Issue 8 Winter 2010

I Want Your Skull is a very unusual art project. It brings together all manner of artists, designers, toy makers, photographers and screen printers with a focus on one theme: The Skull.

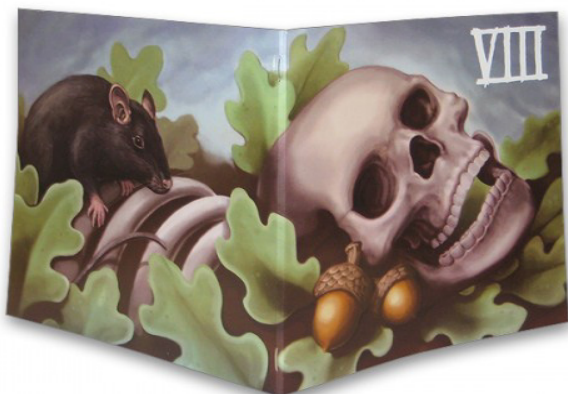


I Want Your Skull was started in October of 2006 by Ryan August as a reaction against the gross commercialization and commodification of the sacred image of the skull. The backlash against skull imagery from popular design circles was fierce, noting the ever apparent watering down of this powerful image in popular culture as an excuse to discredit its merit. Of course, these same critics had no qualms about littering a nation of yuppies' living rooms with octopuses and tree silhouettes in muted pinks, browns and blues.

The solution was easy: create a sanctuary where like-minded artisans could celebrate this ancient imagery free from these dotards. I Want Your Skull was born!

Print issues are compiled several times a year. Each issue features the work of dozens of artists from around the world; as well as, interviews and features on those keeping the tradition of skull imagery alive and vital. The website further promotes the efforts of these individuals, spreading the news of current accomplishments and conquests at the speed of our modern digital age.

I Want Your Skull is now up to Issue 8 which has been released in 250 numbered editions. This issue is a visual treat featuring an amazing full color cover illustrated by Shawn Hebrank.



The issue itself is packed with over thirty five pages of art by Matt Davis, Brian Morris, Rhys Cooper, Scarecrowoven, Matthew Amey, Chris Macdonald, Aaron Wolf, Todd Lambright, Ben Rettke, Tony Morgan, Zirkon777, Wonman Kim, Yahid Rodriguez, Mark Sgarbossa, Heiko Krause, Dwitt, Ryan August, Michael Hacker, Pale Horse, David Lozeau, Dan Terry, Dave the Chimp, Stephen Haynes, Digitalink, Chris Whisby, Matt Loomis, YZR Craftsman, Travis Millaudon, Ty Hudgins, Michael Canich, Jason Goad, Joe Boccia, Derek Deal, Swarez and Michael Heinz-Fischer.

As an added bonus there is a custom print/paper craft toy designed by Horrorwood. 5 Colorways are randomly packaged with each book. Each magazine also comes in a custom, metallic inked envelope with a skull on the front. This is one awesome publication!

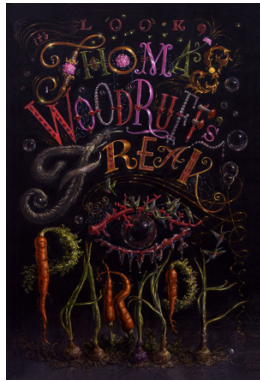
Finally, the hand packaged details you've come to expect from I Want Your Skull are all here. From the hand-numbering (limited to 250 copies), to the hand-printed custom, metallic inked envelopes, each issue is put together with care and shipped straight to your doorway.

Web: <http://www.iwantyourskull.com>



**Thomas Woodruff's
Freak Parade
Thomas Woodruff
Hardy Marks Publication
2010**

On a cold and windy night in 1963, Thomas Woodruff, a peculiar cub scout, carried a large American flag for his troop in the New Rochelle, NY Thanksgiving Day Parade. The event left lingering scars. He was known in the neighbourhood as the boy who staged elaborate puppet shows in his darkened suburban basement.



While still in his twenties, Woodruff collaborated with the avant-garde theatre director Robert Wilson on the decor for his opera Edison, and adapted and storyboarded his stage spectacles for television. He has contributed award-winning illustrations to every major periodical in America, including the memorable back page series "Rock and Roll Still-Life" for Rolling Stone in the early 1990's. He has created the book covers for novels by Ann Tyler, Robertson Davies, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, and many others.

Woodruff has had over 20 one person exhibitions, and his paintings have been included in museum shows internationally. His major gallery works are created in series. In the past these works have often been elegiac in nature and have dealt with the AIDS epidemic. Some of his major projects are *The Secret Charts* (1994), a series of tromp l'oeil scrolls depicting an alphabet of loss; *Apple Canon* (1996), his collection of 365 individual apple "portraits" to "keep the doctor away"; and *All Systems Go* (1999), images organized as "missions" incorporating rocketships, Woodruff's meditation on the end of the millennium.

Freak Parade is his most ambitious project, five years in the making, bringing together images of circuses, sideshows, Roman frescoes, theatre and movie posters and even religious paintings to create a very singular style. Each of the images includes a caption, tale or poem each written by the artist. Many of these are also written in such a way to be a work of art in their own right.

The book opens with a number of introductions including The Wizard of Odd by Carlo McCormick, senior editor of Paper magazine. The first image by Woodruff is a poetic piece which in-



Anatomy Boy

vites us to clear a simple path and enter into the world which he offers us.

The parade begins with Anatomy Boy, a strapping young lad flayed from the shoulders down holding a posy of flowers and chain by the hand and ends with The Grim Reaper/Sweeper, a grim reaper dressed in a costume of metal and baubles who sweeps away the debris of the parade with a broom topped with flowers.

These two images bookend some thirty others images which are startling in their originality, beauty and iconography. There is a bruised beast surrounded by ventricles from a heart in the shape of a tree riding on a cart filled with pearls. Monkey Does is an arresting image of a monkey basking over a fire from which butterflies and bubbles float, while Siamese Wolves in Sheep's Clothing brings together the sideshow tradition of the circus with the old Biblical tale. There is a troubadour which is a giant bug, Bambi-Lyn who have many breasts and Flower Boy, a beautiful living embodiment of alchemical brilliance.

This is a large oversized volume reproduced in stunning colour; each of the characters of the parade is presented in a full page print with a description accompanying the text. This is a visually powerful volume and is filled with images which will haunt your dreams for a long time after seeing it.



Cheesecake: Gay Celebrities Depantsed by Paul Richmond!

Why are Jesse Archer, Mike Ruiz, Jack Mackenroth and Perez Hilton losing their pants?

Because artist Paul Richmond has enlisted their modelling services for his upcoming exhibit of male pin-up paintings called *Cheesecake*.

The show, which will feature oil paintings of fourteen gay male celebrities, opens at the Center on Halsted in Chicago this June.

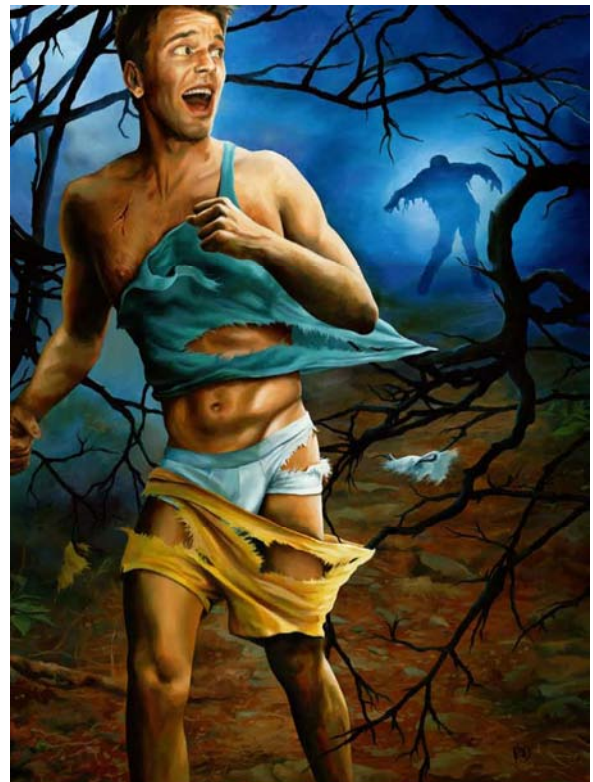
According to Richmond, *"It intrigues me that it was almost exclusively women who were depicted as hapless victims of comical wardrobe malfunctions in early pin-up art."*

Those ladies couldn't even walk down the street without their skirts blowing up or their underwear falling down (or both!). Meanwhile, male pin-ups by artists like Tom of Finland were generally afforded more control over their sexy shenanigans. I believe gravity and other forces conspiring to rob people of their clothing should take an equal-opportunity approach."

And thus, his impressive line-up of Cheesecake models should be prepared for a revealing experience. Paul recently released his first painting for the show, a tribute to slasher flick victims, featuring actor and *Out* columnist Jesse Archer as the damsel in distress. He is shown running through a spooky forest with a shadowy, knock-kneed monster hot on his tail.

Of course the treacherous branches tear Jesse's skimpy outfit to shreds in the process, leaving him in little more than his skiwies.

Archer provided the artist with photo references for the project, and even helped him connect with several other celebrities who will soon be



In Hot Pursuit Paul Richmond Starring Jesse Archer

added to the show, including Ari Gold, Alec Mapa, and Darryl Stephens.

"I've never been painted before and it's an honor because Paul is so talented," explains Jesse. "I also love his concept for me ! can't think of anything better than an homage to female slasher victims who can't keep their clothes on!"

The painting, titled "In Hot Pursuit. Starring Jesse Archer," is available as a limited-edition giclee print in Paul's online store: www.paulypants.etsy.com

Jack Mackenroth, fashion designer and Project Runway alum, commented, *"I love the arts in all forms and do anything I can to support them. Paul's very talented and I am looking forward to the final piece."*

Paul Richmond's paintings have been displayed in exhibitions at museums and galleries around the country, including the World of Wonder Gallery in Los Angeles, Gallery Arcane in San Francisco, and the Columbus Museum of Art in Columbus, Ohio. Cheesecake will be Richmond's first exhibition in Chicago.

He has also created numerous illustrations for gay novel covers and was recently selected as one of GLAAD's Top 100 Artists because of his controversial painting "Noah's Gay Wedding Cruise." His work is featured in the erotic art anthology "Stripped Uncensored" by Bruno Gmunder as well as the upcoming "100 Artists of the Male Figure" by Schiffer Publishing.

He lives with his partner Dennis Niekro and their two whippets in Columbus, Ohio.

Just some of his exhibitions include:

2009 Sweet 'n Low: Optimism in a Pessimistic Age, Gallery Arcane, San Francisco, California, Curated by Karyn Jane Hunt. Invitational.

2009 Being Gay: A Visual Dialogue Between Straight and LGBTQ Artists, 2nd City Council Art Gallery, Long Beach, California. Juried by David Burns, Austin Young, and Matias Viegner.

2009 10th Annual Dirty Show, Bert's Warehouse Theater. Detroit. Michigan. Invitational.

2008 RuPaul's Drag Show, World of Wonder Gallery, Hollywood, CA. Curated by RuPaul. Invitational.

2008 The Circus Show & Other Atrocities, A Bitchin' Space, Sacramento, California. Curated by Gale Hart.

2008 Hollywood DC: Lights ! Camera ! Election!, World of Wonder Gallery, Hollywood, California, Invitational.

2007 Ins and Outs: A Revival. BOMA: Bar of Modern Art, Columbus, Ohio. Curated by Jamie Galbreath.

Websites

<http://www.paulrichmondstudio.com>

<http://www.paulypants.etsy.com>

www.paulrichmondstudio.blogspot.com

Paul has been very nice to us at Synergy and made available three of his Cheesecake prints.



These are superb items and really grab attention. For your chance to win send the word *Cheesecake* in the subject to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with your name and address in the body of the message. This giveaway is available worldwide.



Droplets Series II Crazy Label

Web: <http://shop.crazylabel.com>

Whilst the Grandmaster Droplet rests his sleepy self deep within the cosy walls of the Jam Factory, the next generation of slick ricks have learnt all they can at the Crazylabel dojo and are now ready to explore the big wide world with their squirrel-like curiosity. Go forth young Droplets!

The series II range of droplets follow-on from the highly successful and ever so cute first series. The droplets are 2" in height and come in blind-box. There are five in all to collect, each in brightly unique colours. All of the droplets has real personality and is striking in appearance; one even comes with his own crown!

The detail on these little figures has to be seen to be believed, right down to the ties on some of their arms and their different facial markings and expressions. Just look at their faces, one is green with one eye raised and has a frown; another is blue with a lightning bolt and a smile. The king has a mouth with whiskers while another has an eye patch.

Considering they are only priced at \$8.00 U.S per blind box there are superb collectible items and will sell out fast. You can also purchase a full case and get 5% discount. Each full case consists of 16 blind boxes and guarantees you of a complete set of figures.



Boris U1 Toys

Web: <http://u1toyarts.com/>

Boris came 6th in the Plastic and Plush best toys for 2009 and is truly a winner. He is the first toy from artist Nathan Hamill and while coming in at 2.5" is striking in both presentation and detail. He has a dark and moody facial expression, a black and purple colouring and a real presence. Boris is the first number in the Picnic Land series and is released in a limited edition of 1,000.

Want your Boris in Bronze ? The Bronze Boris comes in a limited edition of 25 and comes on a bronze base with nameplate.



Nathan Hamill is a mostly self-taught artist from Los Angeles with an affinity for large eyed creatures, both bashful and surly. He was raised on a healthy diet of cartoons, comics, movies and toys, which informed his personality and artistic sensibilities. He plays well with others. His friends include illustration, painting, block printing, sculpture and toy design.

You can see his work at nathanhamill.com.

Le Lab is a bit like the little monkey in their logo: mischievous and full of curiosity, clever and maybe a little insolent.



Le Lab is a creative laboratory which experiments with all manner of styles, graphic forms and different artists. Impassioned by the graphic culture and the support that designer toys offer, Le Lab has created a structure that makes it possible for the artists to express themselves and to be recognized with the goal of developing new and original products.



Le Lab was born from the passion of two friends. Bee has a great deal of experience working with toy manufacturers in Asia. She specializes in overseeing the manufacturing of the toys as well as in sustaining negotiations over various time zones.

Denis is a graphic art fanatic; his curiosity leads him to plunge into the universe that is "artistic styles".

He imagined a toy that would introduce the company to the art toys community; the toy is called *Playing Art*. This toy was envisioned to be different from current designer toys; it has a larger numbers of articulations and offers true virgin surfaces. Since the logo of the company represents a small monkey, Playing Art uses its shape but the face remains flat not to override creativity.

The Playing Art platform is made of a Rotocast vinyl head and ABS body. Each figure is 8" tall by 5.5" wide and has eight points of articulation.

The number of articulation points is very



impressive including ball joint neck, fully articulated tail and three joints in each arm. Each edition comes in 350 pieces. The presentation boxes are rather nice, the Moon-K can even be transformed into a space station.

There is a D.I.Y edition of the basic design for your own individual exploration. It is about 8" tall, articulated, has a round head, flat face, arms waved and a flexible tail.



Bali-Bali

This is a superbly visual articulated vinyl figure about 8" tall based on the Le-Lab Playing Art form, designed by Spasm One. Bali-Bali is a dragon spirit condemned to dance forever. The face has a very striking Balinese design while the body is basic black with yellow hands and tip of the tail edged with patterns.



Moon-K

Moon-K is an articulated plastic figure about 8" tall based on the Le-Lab Playing Art form, transformed by Lejam.

He comes with blank black eye sockets which can be transformed into all manner of expressions. It includes a sticker sheet with over 16 possible eyes designs! This is an amazing little robotic monkey with a star on his chest and intriguing lines and designs.



Woodi

Woodi is an articulated vinyl figure about 8" tall based on the Le-Lab Playing Art form and designed by Aro. Woodi is the last living greenery-ape from backside of Jupiter and is truly eccentric.

He is marked with strange angled blue patterns and a very attention grabbing grin. He is highly stylized in presentation.



Jessica and Marcel

Jessica and Marcel are the Le Lab Mascot in articulated vinyl. They have Rotocast vinyl head and body with PVC appendages, each is nearly 7" in height with tail included. They come in original presentation (brown hair and red shirts) and wild (black hair and black shirts).

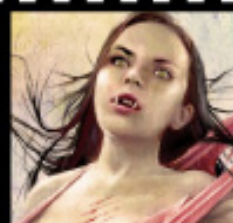
They have six points of articulation (neck, shoulders, tail, and legs) and are superbly detailed with very expressive faces. They come with two sets of hands and real outfits (T-shirt (Jessica) and Tank Top (Marcel)). They were created by Tizieu, a well-known French artist.

For more information and to buy these superb toys visit: <http://www.lelab-toys.com>

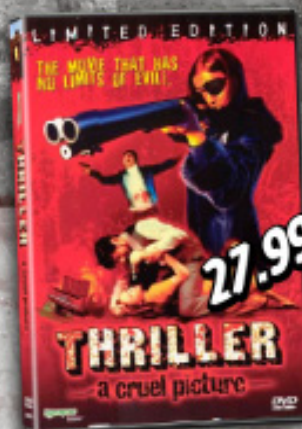
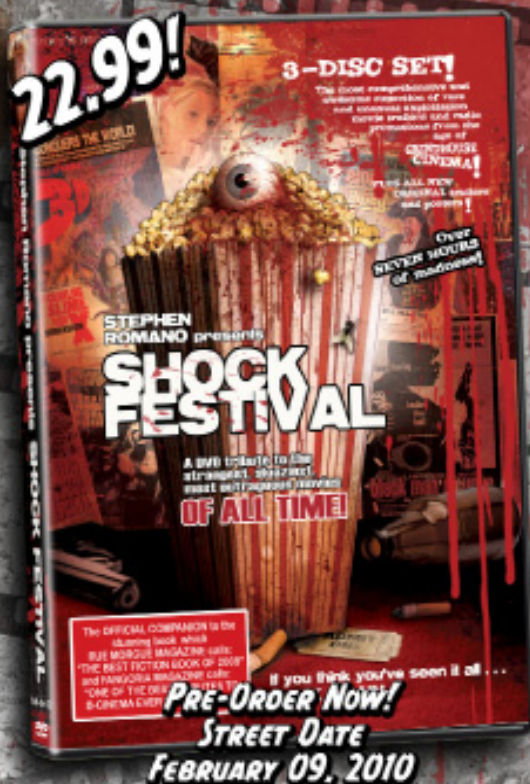


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